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OCCASIONAL SERMONS:

ON

DOCTRINAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY

ABRAHAM SCOTT.

"WHICH THINGS WE SPEAK, NOT IN THE WORDS WHICH MAN'S WISDOM
TEACHETH, BUT WHICH THE HOLY GHOST TEACHETH."—ST. PAUL.

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PREFACE.

THE Rev. G. Burder, when he published a volume of sermons, said, "The author has not scrupled to 'avail himself of the aid of several excellent writers, 'especially of CHARNOCK, to whom he frankly owns, 'that he is indebted for many of the best thoughts 'in the following pages.' When such an acknowledgement is not expressed, it may in some measure be understood, of all writers on Divinity at the present day. Men read for the purpose of information, and from the fund thus acquired, they communicate to others; but at the time of writing, they may not know from what source their ideas have been derived, nor whether they have been obtained by reading, or their own meditations; nor is this always needful to be known, either to themselves or their readers. If the words of another author be employed, they should be marked as a quotation; but how far the thoughts of other writers may be introduced without a formal acknowledgement, has never yet been properly defined. In the discussion of some topics, for instance, the Resurrection of Christ, and the Evidences of Christianity, if any justice be done to the subject, many arguments must be used which former writers have employed; yet it may not always be requisite to state where they may be found, nor possible to ascertain from whom they first originated.

The Rev. J. M'Laurin, of Glasgow, composed a sermon which was afterwards published, on Glorifying in the cross of Christ; which has been very highly and deservedly esteemed. But the excellence of that discourse, need not discourage those who come after him from discussing the same subject, though they may have to introduce some of the same ideas. If this was not allowable, M'Laurin's sermon ought not to have been published; for notwithstanding undisputed marks of original composition, many of his best thoughts are to be found in former authors. But still, as that discourse is before the public, and stands unrivalled for pulpit eloquence, evangelical sentiment, and sound doctrinal disquisition, it may be asked, what reason there can be to publish another sermon on the same topic? There may be many reasons for this: another sermon may be more condensed and better arranged; it may supply some defects, and lop off some redundancies; it may be more plain, more experimental, and more practical; and consequently better adapted for general edification.

In the composition of a sermon, the end to be kept in view, is to make people wiser and better; to induce them to embrace and hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints, that they may obtain the end of their faith—the salvation of their souls. So far as a discourse is adapted to this purpose, it is to that extent a valuable production, from whatever source it has been derived: if it is not adapted to this purpose, it is no matter whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.

SERMON I.

“Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”—1 THESS. i. 5.

WHEN Paul was in lesser Asia, he had a vision, in which he saw a man who prayed him saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. This he regarded as a call from heaven to preach the gospel to that people, and immediately commenced his journey; and in a short time arrived at Thessalonica, which at that time was the metropolis of Macedonia. At this place, during three Sabbath-days, he went into the synagogue of the Jews, and reasoned with them out of the scriptures; opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead. And some of the Jews believed; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude. These believers were formed into a Christian community, possessing miraculous gifts, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. But the Jews which believed not, raised a tumult in the city, and assaulted the house where Paul lodged; intending to bring him out to the enraged populace, that he might fall a prey to their vengeance. But by the aid of his friends he was able to make his escape. After his departure, those who had embraced the gospel, suffered persecution; Paul was vilified as an impostor; and the doctrines he had taught were condemned as false and pernicious: by which means the faith of some was in danger of being overthrown. On this account the apostle stood forth in defence

of the gospel, and appealed to the evidence of its truth, which attended its publication among them. He says, Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, with the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance.

The first consideration is, that the gospel comes by word : otherwise it could not be heard. And it requires and deserves to be heard, for it is the word of truth, the word of grace, the word of reconciliation, the word of life, and the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. It is not to be received as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God. — When the gospel comes in word, it sets forth all the doctrines which relate to the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ ; it gives that instruction in righteousness which is able to make men wise unto salvation.

The gospel comes in word, by those who preach Christ ; warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. In order that men may receive Christ, they must be convinced of their sinful state ; it is only as they are sinners, that they need a saviour. The whole have no need of a physician, but they who are sick. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Sin is the transgression of the law ; and of this all have been guilty. All flesh has corrupted its way. The hearts of men are set in them to do evil. They are far gone from original righteousness : and are consequently involved in guilt and condemnation. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. The doom of heaven is, the soul that sinneth it shall die : and this is to be understood of death eternal ; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. From this guilt and danger men cannot accomplish their own de-

liverance: they can make no atonement for their past transgressions; nor purify their hearts. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they know not: so that if they were left to themselves, they would inevitably perish.

But when the gospel comes in word, it shows, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Christ came into the world to save sinners. He took human nature into union with his own; that he might be a mediator between God and man; that he might make reconciliation for iniquity; and bring in everlasting righteousness. For this purpose he was made a sacrifice for sin; for it pleased the Lord to lay on him the iniquities of us all. In order that he might save all who come unto him, he died for their sin, and rose again for their justification; and is their advocate with the Father. Wherefore he is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them. He is willing to save the chief of sinners; he is a Saviour all complete; and the only Saviour that Heaven has provided. There is none other name given among men, whereby we must be saved: there is salvation in no other.

When the gospel comes in word, it offers Christ as an universal saviour, as a free saviour, as a present saviour, and as an everlasting saviour. The Almighty is not willing that any should perish: hence it pleased him that Christ should taste death for every man: that he should give himself a ransom for all: and be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Therefore all are invited to partake of his mercy and grace. Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. By grace are ye saved; not of works lest any man should boast. On God's part all things are now ready. Behold now is the

accepted time: and now is the day of salvation. The benefits which Christ bestows are unlimited in duration; for he is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.

When the gospel comes in word, it specifies the terms, on which sinners are to obtain acceptance with God. When the apostle has stated what Christ has done to save sinners, he says, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? This shows that it may be neglected: yet this could not be the case, if no duty was required on the part of man. What is required of sinners, in order to their salvation, is repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence wherever the apostles went to preach the gospel, they showed that men must repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. They required them to forsake every evil way; to come before the Lord with a broken spirit, and a contrite heart; to turn their feet unto God's testimonies; to be diligent in the means of grace; and make earnest supplication for mercy. All this was understood, when they said, Repent and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out. Without this there can be no forgiveness with God. If a man without repentance, should exercise confidence in Christ, it would not be true faith, but presumption. It would not remove his guilt, but add sin to sin. But repentance itself would be unavailing, without faith in Christ. By repentance sin is felt to be a burden too heavy to bear; and by faith that burden is removed. So that to every true penitent the language of the gospel is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

When the gospel comes in word, it announces the benefits which are obtained by those who embrace it. One of these benefits is the pardon of all their iniquities. For God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing to them their

trespasses. It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again the third day, that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name among all nations; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Another gospel benefit, is adoption into the family of heaven. On this subject St. John exclaims, What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! And he declares this to be the common privilege of all believers. He says, Christ came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Whenever men believe with their hearts unto righteousness, that moment they receive the adoption of sons. Another gospel benefit, is the renewal of the heart in righteousness and true holiness: for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new. He is sanctified by the truth. The benefits of the gospel are too great to be expressed, and too numerous to be specified. But among them must be ranked the fruits and consolations of the Holy Spirit: earnestness and foretastes of heaven: a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away: victory over death and the grave: and the promise of being kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. Therefore blessed are the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; they shall rejoice in thy name all the day; in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.

When the gospel comes in word, it charges those who have believed in God, to be careful to maintain good works: to let their light shine before men; that they may adorn the doctrine of God their

Saviour. This part of the gospel is expressed by our Saviour in the following manner, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. St. Paul says, the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. And St. James says, faith without works is dead.

When the gospel comes in word, it shows that it is requisite for believers to grow in grace: for it is by this means only that they can hold fast whereunto they have attained, and make their calling and election sure. They are spared in the world, and variously exercised, that they may be made more meet for heaven; and so prepared for a greater weight of glory. All the ordinances of religion are for the perfecting of the saints, for their increase in knowledge, faith, and holiness, so as to be filled with all the fulness of God. Whatever they have received from the Lord, is a deposit for improvement, that at his coming he may receive his own with usury. On this account the apostle says, This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark; that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

When the gospel comes in word, it shows the necessity of perseverance; for it is he that endures to the end that shall be saved. If any who had escaped the corruptions which are in the world, are again entangled therein, the last state of such is worse than the first: they have drawn back to perdition. It is by patient continuance in well-doing, that men are to seek for immortality and eternal life. Therefore be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not. Christ says

to each of his followers, Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

The gospel comes not in word only, but with power. And the question now is, what is to be understood by the power which is here spoken of? When Paul preached at Thessalonica, he gave proof of his apostleship, by signs, wonders, and mighty deeds: by which means many were convinced of the truth, and induced to embrace the Christian religion: and this was a manifestation of divine power. But without any reference to miracles, the apostle might say, I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. This power it possesses at the present day, as is evinced by the effects it produces. Whenever a great work is accomplished, a great power must have been employed. Great opposition can be overcome only by superior might. The evil propensities of human nature, are strongly opposed to the dominion of Christ; so that many are resolved, they will not have Him to reign over them. The heart of man by nature is hard and obdurate; on which account the scripture terms it a heart of stone. It is destitute of spiritual sensibility; and while men have such a heart in them, they can commit crimes without compunction; for their consciences are seared as with a hot iron. They are so hardened in iniquity, as to have no fear of God before their eyes. The divine goodness does not lead them to repentance; nor does divine wrath give them any alarm; even when smitten by the judgements of heaven, they rebel more and more. And thus, by a hard and impenitent heart, they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God. And it must be a great power that overcomes this hardness of heart. But this has often been done by the gospel. It has been quick and powerful, sharper

than a two-edged sword. It has been as a hammer to break the rock in pieces. Under the word, men have been convinced of all their iniquities; and brought to confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart. They have come before God like the publican, who durst not lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast and said, God be merciful to me a sinner. And whenever the gospel produces a broken spirit and a contrite heart, it comes not in word only, but also with power.

The heart of man, by nature, is full of pride and self-sufficiency: so that many think themselves rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing; when they are wretched, and miserable, poor, and blind, and naked. But the gospel has brought many such to see, that they were destitute of every gracious disposition; that in their flesh dwelt no good thing; that there was no soundness in them. So that they have been covered with shame and confusion of face, and have abhorred themselves as in dust and ashes. And such a change discovers the power of the gospel.

The will of man, by nature, is obstinate and rebellious; for the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be. So that the Almighty may say of many, as he did of Israel of old, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me: all the day long, have I stretched out my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people. Yet multitudes of this description, have had their rebellious dispositions subdued by the influence of the gospel. In the day of God's power, they have become willing and obedient. They have been induced to say, Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? What I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. They acknowledge the

authority of Christ; they bow to his sceptre; and take his yoke upon them. And to such the gospel has come with power.

The heart by nature is set upon the world; it pursues no other object; it seeks no other gratification. It is more influenced by earthly riches, honours, and pleasures, than by either the hope of heaven, or the fear of hell. But the gospel has brought many such to seek a better portion; to forsake their broken cisterns for the fountain of living waters; to set their affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. To lay up their treasure in heaven, where moth doth not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. So that they are no longer influenced by worldly considerations. By the cross of Christ, in which they glory, they have been crucified unto the world, and the world unto them. And where such a change has been effected, the gospel has come with power. There is no evil propensity in human nature, which it has not been the instrument of eradicating; hence Christ says, Ye are clean, through the word I have spoken unto you. Such a renovation of the heart by the gospel, is a manifestation of its great power. It is true that this change of heart is not visible, only as a tree is known by its fruits; but when good fruit is brought forth, it is evident that the tree has been made good; and this is what the gospel is seen to effect. Many who were carnal, sold under sin, in captivity to the law of sin, have been brought out of that bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Hence the apostle says, Thanks be to God, though ye were the servants of sin, yet being made free from sin, ye became the servants of God, having your fruit unto holiness and your end eternal life. When the gospel is truly received, the drunkard becomes sober; the Sabbath-breaker remembers the Lord's day, to keep it holy;

the blasphemer learns to reverence the name of the Lord. All who obey the gospel, cease to do evil, and learn to do well; they put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light. They are zealous of good works; and shine as lights in the world. And to such the gospel has come with power: with a power that is supernatural; a power from on high. For men are tied and bound with the chain of their iniquities, till the pitifulness of God's tender mercies loose them. This is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes. The apostle attributes all the success of the gospel to a divine power; he says, Paul planted and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God; pulling down strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. It was by divine power that all things were created and made; and it is by the same power, that men are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. It is only a divine power that can raise the dead; and it is the same power, that raises men from a death in sin, to a new birth of righteousness. The apostle says, You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. Our Saviour, speaking on this subject, says, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear, shall live. In such cases the gospel comes with power.

The apostle proceeds to say, Our gospel came with the Holy Ghost. And we are now to consider how this is to be understood. The Holy Ghost may be here mentioned, to denote the source from whence the power of the gospel is derived. More-

over, the apostle makes a distinction, between divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Though the apostles received miraculous power, by the Holy Ghost coming upon them, yet in some respects there was a difference between that power and the gifts of the Spirit. Miraculous power was conferred on some individuals; but the fruits of the Spirit were given to all believers. Many might have miraculous power, and not be in a state of salvation; if they could remove mountains, and had not charity, it would profit them nothing; but the fruits of the Spirit secure the favour of God, and constitute a meetness for heaven. After a time, miracles were to cease; but the Spirit was always to abide with Christ's church and people: so there was a distinction between the gospel coming with power, and coming with the Holy Ghost. And this distinction may in some measure still be made. It comes with power when it subdues the heart, and reforms the life; and by this means removes what hindered men's acceptance with God: but it more properly comes in the Holy Ghost, when men are put into a state of salvation. One kills, and the other makes alive; one wounds, and the other heals; one prepares the heart, and the other takes possession.

The gospel comes in the Holy Ghost, when it produces a saving knowledge of Christ. Speaking of the Spirit, our Saviour says, When he is come he shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and show it unto you. It is true that the scriptures contain the revelation which God has given of his Son. But so long as there remains a veil over the human heart, the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not. And it is the office of the Spirit to remove this veil; to open the eyes of the understanding, that men may know the things which are freely given them of God. This is not by making a new revelation of Christ, but by enabling them to

understand the scriptures. The apostle says, For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. By this light men behold his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Hence they can then say, I have long heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee; and know indeed, that this is Christ, the Saviour of the world; who loved me, and gave himself for me. And such will esteem all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

The gospel comes in the Holy Ghost, when it produces saving faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; but all faith so acquired, is not that by which any can be saved. If it be only an assent to the truth, that leaves the heart unmoved, and unchanged, it has no saving effect. Saving faith works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. In faith there is the faculty, and the exercise; the former is exclusively the gift of God; the latter is the act of man: but in the act he is assisted by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God, in the hearts of men, restrains the propensity to unbelief; it produces a love to the truth, and an earnest desire to obtain it; it brings gospel truth to remembrance, and fixes the attention to what is to be believed, that is to what is suitable to the present occasion; and throws light on the evidence of truth. In this manner faith is of the operation of God. So that when men believe to the saving of the soul, the gospel has come unto them with the Holy Ghost.

The Gospel comes in the Holy Ghost, when men obtain the evidence of their acceptance with God. This is the fruit of faith, produced at the same time: yet it requires a distinct consideration. As it is with God that men have to do, in all the concerns of their

salvation, it is highly desirable, that they should have the testimony that they please him. How the favour of God is to be obtained, is clearly set forth by the precepts and promises of the gospel: Come unto me, says Christ, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. But though a true penitent may firmly believe this, he may not be able to apply the promise to himself, and so may remain under fears and doubts. But the Holy Spirit enables him to apply the promise to himself; to believe that Christ is willing to save him that moment. And thus he receives the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself, beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

The gospel comes in the Holy Ghost, when it purifies the heart. No unholy thing can enter heaven: hence the great object with believers, is to be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; that they may perfect holiness in the fear of God. For this purpose Christ gave himself for them, that he might sanctify and cleanse them, with the washing of water by the word. But when the word is the instrument, the Spirit is the agent; for believers are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. The apostle says, We beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord. All the holiness which believers possess, is the fruit of the Spirit: hence it is proper to pray, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit; that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.

The gospel comes in the Holy Ghost, when it gives consolation. This is what the gospel is intended to give, as the prophet intimates when he says, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace, that cry unto Zion, Thy God reigneth? Arise, shine,

thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. But it is the Spirit that causeth it to produce this happy effect. When believers have a peace with God that passeth understanding, and a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, it is the peace and joy of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter which Christ has promised to his followers, in order that they may draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. When the Spirit of God fills and rules the heart, they can say, my soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour: and to such the gospel has come with the Holy Ghost.

It is further stated, that the gospel comes in much assurance. That is, it was fully proved to be a revelation from heaven. Those who published the gospel, wrought miracles to demonstrate that they had a commission from the Almighty, to preach it to the world.—Another evidence of its truth was, the apostles by preaching the gospel obtained no worldly advantage; but were involved in the greatest afflictions and privations. They had great labour and travail, by night and by day; they did not speak as pleasing men, nor of men sought they glory. The apostle says, Ye are witnesses, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves: so that they were entitled to credit as teachers of true religion. Another evidence was this: We exhorted you, says the apostle, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.—They condemned every vicious practice, and by the strongest motives, inculcated holiness of heart and life: so that the gospel they preached was worthy the true God; and in the highest degree beneficial to mankind.—And the apostles themselves knew the truth of the gospel, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In this manner the gospel was proved to be true to the Thessalonians.

The gospel comes with much assurance at the present day. It is true we do not see the miracles performed; but we may know that those had seen them, to whom the apostle wrote; because he appeals to what had been wrought in their presence; and ordered it to be read in the churches; which would have ruined his credit, if no such signs and wonders had been wrought among them. As the apostles professed to work miracles, unless they had really done so, how could the primitive Christians have been induced to embrace a new religion, in opposition to every earthly interest, and at the constant hazard of their lives? So that even with respect to miracles, the gospel still comes with much assurance.—The evidence, arising from the purity and excellence of its precepts and doctrines, which are so honourable to God, and profitable to man, is as clear and convincing at the present day, as at any former period. The rapid and extensive propagation of the gospel, considering the weakness of the instruments employed, and the formidable opposition it had to encounter, is an evidence of its truth; and this evidence is much stronger in the present day, than it was in the apostle's time. And so likewise is the evidence arising from the fulfilment of prophecy; because many predictions have been since accomplished. Therefore the gospel still comes in much assurance, and is worthy of all acceptance.

There is another evidence of the gospel, which has its seat in the heart. He that believeth hath the witness in himself. Our Saviour says, If any man will do my will, he shall know whether the doctrine be of God. Such know its divine origin by their own experience. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts; they have a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; they have a joy that a stranger intermeddles not with. Though they were once darkness, yet they are now light in

the Lord. Hence they are able to give a reason for the hope that is in them. If any objection be made against the truth of religion, they can reply, One thing I know, that whereas I was once blind, now I see. They know the gospel is from heaven, because it brings a measure of heaven upon earth: for all believers have eternal life abiding in them. When the heart is renewed in righteousness and true holiness, it furnishes an evidence of the truth of the gospel, which infidels can no more invalidate, than they can extinguish the light of the sun. Thus the gospel comes not in word only, but with power, with the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance.

It is needful for the gospel to come in the manner here described. It is essentially requisite that the gospel should come in word; by which its facts may be stated, its doctrines divulged, and its promises proclaimed; for this lays the foundation of the whole Christian superstructure; which cannot stand unless it be well founded. All true Christians, are those who hear the word of God and understand it; which they could not do unless the gospel came in word.

But if the gospel comes in word only, it will be unavailing: it will not procure the salvation of the soul. In order that this may be accomplished, it must come with power: it must be applied to the heart with divine energy. And this the Almighty has engaged to grant; and nothing will be wanting on his part. But while this affords all needful aid and assistance, it requires concurrence on the part of man. Christ says, Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: but he requires those within to open the door; and it is entirely for the want of this, if men are not saved. See then that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

It is requisite for the gospel to come with the Holy

Ghost; which in some measure it does, whenever it is attended with divine power: but besides this, it is requisite to have the Spirit in all its enlightening, quickening, and purifying influences. This is promised; and faithful is he who has promised, who also will do it. Therefore cherish its influences; and pray that it may be shed on you abundantly; as the former and the latter rain in its season: that you may have a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

It is needful for the gospel to come in much assurance; in order that you may not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but be strong in faith, bringing glory to God. And likewise, that those who have received the truth in the love thereof, may remain grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. How have you received the gospel? It is sent to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified. Unless it has produced these effects, you have received the grace of God in vain: therefore examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Know ye not your own selves, how that Christ is in you except ye be reprobates? If you are so, do not rest till you know your election of God; and then it may be said, Our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

SERMON II.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—REV. iii. 20.

THESE words are contained in the message which our Saviour sent to the church at Laodicea; and in this message he is described as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. The term, Amen, in this place, denotes truth; which is a title given to Christ, as he performed the mercy promised unto the fathers; in this manner he appeared in the world, full of grace and truth. He may be called the faithful witness, in reference to the communication of divine truth, which he has made to the world; and he will bear a faithful testimony of men to God, the judge of all, for he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make known the counsels of the heart. The beginning of the creation, is not to be understood of the commencement of it; *Ἀρχή*, denotes head, author, or efficient cause; in this sense it applies to Christ; for all things were made by him, and for him; and without him was not any thing made that was made: and therefore he has in all things the pre-eminence. This adorable being had such kindness to the human race, that he came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost: and for this purpose he causeth them to hear the word of his grace. To you he says, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.—He likewise gives them the

intimations of his gracious presence, as appears by the words before us; Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.

When a person knocks at the door, it is to obtain admission into the house: so the words in the text are to be understood. Man is represented in scripture, under the emblem of a house or habitation; Solomon, speaking of the infirmities of old age, says, In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble; and those that look out of the windows be darkened.—The Christian community is called the house of God; and Christ is said to be faithful as a son over his own house: and to this household of faith, the promise of the Almighty is, I will dwell in you, and I will walk in you. The apostle calls the church at Ephesus, an habitation of God through the Spirit. This is equally applicable to every individual believer. Man was originally formed to be a temple for the living God; and where there is purity of heart, it is more acceptable to the Almighty, than all the temples made with hands; hence he says, Where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? I dwell with him that is of a contrite spirit. In like manner Christ is said to dwell in the heart by faith: Know ye not that Christ is in you except ye be reprobates? But when Christ stands at the door to knock, it shows that he is kept without, and has not obtained admission. This is the case, wherever the heart is unrenewed by divine grace. Where evil thoughts are lodged, and sinful propensities harboured, there Satan has his seat: for he is the spirit that works in the hearts of the children of disobedience. And where the wicked one has the dominion, men are without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. For what communion has light with darkness? or Christ with Belial? Therefore the hearts of the ungodly are shut against Christ: they

are in a state of hostility to him ; for their hearts are set in them to do evil ; and in effect they say to Christ, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.

In a large habitation, some apartments may be occupied, when others are empty ; but in the unrenewed heart, every apartment is destitute of Christ. One spacious apartment is the understanding, the faculty of knowledge, which man possesses above all the creatures of this lower world. But by nature men have no aptitude to acquire the knowledge of Christ ; for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. Whatever learning such men may possess, the apostle describes them as alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts. The gospel is the revelation which God has given of his Son ; but to the carnally-minded, it is a light shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. The god of this world has blinded their minds, lest the light of the gospel should shine unto them. Destruction and misery are in their ways ; and the way of peace they know not. Christ was in the world, and the world was made by him ; but the world knew him not. Yet this was their own fault : hence our Saviour says, This is condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them.—Hence it appears, that men by nature have their understandings darkened, and are destitute of the knowledge of Christ.

Another apartment in the human heart, is the will, the faculty of choice. This is a faculty of great importance, as it is that which makes man an ac-

countable creature ; it is the source of all moral good or evil in the actions of men. Nothing can be done that will please God, unless there be first a willing mind ; nor is any thing to be regarded as sinful, unless the will has given its consent. But an unsanctified will is not under the influence of Christ. Whilst men live in sin, Christ is not the object of their choice ; they see no beauty nor comeliness in him to make him be desired : he is despised and rejected of men ; they oppose his authority, and say, in effect, We will not have this man to reign over us. This is the reason why they remain in guilt and condemnation ; hence he says, How often would I have gathered you, as a hen doeth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ? Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly.—Were men willing to receive Christ, nothing could hinder their salvation ; for whoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely. Hence it appears that every unrenewed will is destitute of Christ.

Another apartment in the human heart, is the affections ; by which may be understood an union of esteem and desire, producing complacency and delight, which is called love. This affection should be set on Christ, for he is altogether lovely ; and has laid men under so many obligations, by his cross and passion, his agony and bloody sweat, that those who do not love him are guilty of the basest ingratitude : hence the apostle says, If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maran-atha. But none can love Christ who love sin : for sin is what Christ hateth ; it was sin that nailed him to the cross ; it is sin that crucifies the Son of God afresh, and puts him to an open shame ; it is sin that causeth him to die in vain, by causing the destruction of immortal souls. So that those who love Christ, hate iniquity ; and consequently, those

who love sin, have an aversion to Christ. They dislike his rule and dominion : they have no love to his house and ordinances ; no love to his cause and interest ; no love to his church and people. If they loved him, they would keep his commandments ; they would meditate upon his perfections ; they would think it an honour to suffer for him ; they would give up whatever was contrary to his will and pleasure ; they would imitate his example ; they would live in union and fellowship with him ; they would acknowledge him before the world ; they would show forth his praise ; they would delight in his favour ; and say, Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee ; thou art all my salvation, and all my desire. As their conduct discovers the reverse of all this, it is manifest that Christ has no place in their affections.

Should we examine any other apartment in the human heart, we should be led to the same conclusion, that Christ has no residence there ; but there is no need to examine any other apartment in the heart of man, because if Christ is not in the affections, he can be in no other place, that will either meet with his own acceptance, or be of any profit to the souls of men : so that those who have no place in their affections for Christ, are totally destitute of him, as to all the purposes of their salvation. And this is to be understood by his standing at the door ; that is standing without, as one to whom admittance has not been given.

While men are without Christ, they are under the curse of a broken law ; the wrath of God abideth on them ; and they have a fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries ; but in order to save them from this deplorable state, Christ knocks at the door.—He knocks at the door of the sinner's heart, by the terrors of his holy law ; which gives the knowledge of

sin; and reveals the wrath of God from heaven against all unrighteousness of men. It declares, the soul that sinneth it shall die: for God is angry with the wicked every day. He will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure: for the wicked shall be turned into hell; their worm shall not die; their fire shall not be quenched. This is declared to awaken them to a sense of their danger, before it is too late; it is to warn them to flee from the wrath to come, while the day of grace continues; it is to give them repentance, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who had been led captive by him at his will.—Christ knocks at the door, by the gracious message of the gospel, which shows, that he came into the world to save sinners; and has done every thing requisite for that purpose. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. Wherefore he saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out. Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.

Christ knocks at the door by his Spirit, which he sends to convince men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. When it is said, the Spirit of God shall not always strive with men, it implies, that it does strive with men, during the day of their visitation: and experience proves, that it does this frequently, and powerfully, so as to produce convictions and good desires. The Spirit of God, has access to the heart, either in public or private, either by day or by night, either mediately or immediately. By its own energy, it can bring men to remember their latter end, and give them an earnest concern

for their salvation. But in awakening sinners, it often makes use of instruments; it accompanies the word of life, so as to make it quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword; so that it becomes a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; for the gospel comes not in word only, but with power, with the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance.—The Spirit of God, awakens the conscience to do its duty; by which means many sinners are convicted, by their own consciences. At its tribunal, no other evidence than its own is requisite; because it is acquainted with every secret thought; it sits at every cabinet council of the heart; the darkness and the light are both alike to it: hence for what sinners do in secret, their own hearts condemn them. And this is a call to repentance, that iniquity may not prove their ruin.

Christ knocks at the door, by the visitations of providence. His judgements are abroad in the earth, that the inhabitants may learn righteousness. Men are often involved in deep distress, to induce them to think on their ways, and turn their feet unto God's testimonies. Their worldly circumstances may be embarrassed; they may have many losses and crosses; and be in great straits and difficulties; in order to teach them the vanity of worldly things, and awaken them from the dream of earthly felicity; that they may seek a better portion; that they may forsake their broken cisterns, and come to the fountain of living waters. Men are visited with bodily afflictions, that they may feel themselves in the hands of that Being who can kill and make alive, who can save or destroy; and who will not let sin go unpunished. This has led many to forsake their iniquities. David says, Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but I have since kept thy law. Men are made to see, that death makes its inroads among the circle of their acquaintance; it may enter within their own doors, and cut

down some branches of their own families : and some of these deaths may be sudden and awful : this is to teach survivors, that the grave is the house appointed for all living ; that they know not what a day may bring forth ; that they stand in jeopardy every hour ; in the midst of life they are in death. Every stroke of death, is a solemn warning to those who witness it ; and it says in effect, Prepare to meet thy God. Because there is wrath, beware ; lest he take thee away with his stroke ; then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. By whatever method men are brought to serious reflections on their eternal state, it is one of those means, by which Christ knocks at the door of the heart.

He makes a gracious promise to those who hear his voice, and open the door. The first thing required is to hear his voice. We are not to suppose by this, that Christ ever knocks at the door of the heart, without being heard ; for that would answer no good purpose ; he knows what will be heard, and he can as easily make himself heard, as let it alone. To suppose him to offer mercy in a way that cannot be heard, is to impeach his sincerity ; we may be assured, that he never knocks at the door without being heard. The apostle says, Have they not all heard ? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth ; and their words to the ends of the world.—But the scripture uses the term, hear or hearken, in the sense of taking heed, and acting accordingly. It is said, God does not hear sinners ; that is, he does not answer their prayers. David says, I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice ; that is, granted my request. It is said, Earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord ; that is, regard it, and be directed by it. In this sense the word frequently occurs.—Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways !—To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Moses said, A prophet

shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, him shall ye hear in all things; and it shall come to pass, that every soul that will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed. In the words before us, such a method of hearing is to be understood, as is followed by obedience. In the parable of the sower, the seed was the same in all the various places; but it only brought forth fruit in good ground; hence our Saviour says, Take heed therefore how you hear: this shows, that the benefit of hearing the voice of Christ, depends on the manner in which it is heard. Let his voice be heard with attention, that it may be understood: hear it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God; hear it as the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; hear it with submission to its dictates, and obedience to its precepts, and a confidence in its promises. In this manner, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Another thing required, is to open the door. There is no intimation, that the door of the heart will be forced open. It is true that Christ is able to do this, however strongly it might be bolted by ignorance, prejudice, and unbelief; for he is able to subdue all things to himself. 'He is greater than all the powers of hell; and greater than our hearts.' But the subjection of the heart to the dominion of Christ, is not by compulsion. The gospel offers salvation on certain terms or conditions, with which men are required to comply; they are treated as rational accountable creatures, who must be rewarded or punished according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good or evil. Some plead man's inability to do any thing that is good. This might be done truly, if man was left to himself; but all requisite aid is granted him. So that if he does not comply with the gospel invitation, it is his own fault. When Christ commanded a man to stretch out his withered hand, he gave him power to do so; and in

every case he gives ability for obedience; and the grace he gives is to be exercised. On this principle, he requires men to open the door of their hearts for his admission. The door is opened by discarding whatever is inimical to his interest, and in opposition to his will and pleasure.

Wilful transgression, is in opposition to Christ; it cuts off all union with the Divine Being; for God is light, and in him is no darkness at all; so that if men walk in darkness, they can have no fellowship with him. The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have caused him to hide his face. Therefore wash you, and make you clean; put away the evil of your doing; cease to do evil, and learn to do well. By thus forsaking sin, the door is opened to Christ.—When pride is indulged, it excludes Christ from the heart. And to this vice men are naturally prone; even so far, as to be pure in their own eyes, when they are not cleansed from their filthiness; so as to say, they are rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing; when they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Such a disposition is opposed to the Saviour; for God resisteth the proud; but giveth grace to the humble and meek. Be careful then, not to think of yourselves, more highly than you ought to think; take a proper view of your guilt and depravity; of your vileness and unworthiness; that you may abhor yourselves as in dust and ashes; and be ready to say, To God belong mercy and forgiveness, but unto us, shame and confusion of face. Such humiliation, opens the door to Christ; for he that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that abaseth himself shall be exalted.—Christ is excluded by hardness of heart: therefore to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. The obduracy of

the heart is removed by contrition ; which is a godly sorrow, that worketh repentance unto salvation. Therefore, come before the Lord, with weeping and mourning ; and rend your hearts and not your garments ; and turn unto the Lord your God ; for he is gracious and merciful : To that man he will look, who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at his word. This mourning for sin, is opening the door to Christ, who says, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The door of the heart is opened to Christ by the exercise of faith ; hence it is said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Faith produces a cordial approbation of Christ as a Saviour ; and a willingness to be saved his own way ; and to give him all the glory. Faith counts all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ ; and is ready to sell all former acquisitions, to purchase this pearl of great price. Therefore to you that believe, Christ is precious. Faith brings into captivity, every thought to the obedience of Christ ; it subdues every thing in the heart to his rule and authority ; it receives him as a prophet, a priest, and a king ; it suffers no other lords to have the dominion : and is willing to do whatsoever he has commanded.—Faith produces hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; and such a heart is as open to Christ, as a thirsty land for showers.

Of every one that hears his voice, and opens the door, he says, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he shall sup with me. As this promise is made by the Redeemer of the world, in whom all fulness dwells, and as it is made to such as give him a cordial reception, it includes all those spiritual blessings which their condition requires, and which he died to procure. When Christ enters the human heart, he comes in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace. He comes to all the contrite in

heart, to forgive their iniquities, to heal their diseases, to redeem their life from destruction, and to crown them with loving kindness and tender mercies. To as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God ; even to them that believe in his name.

When Christ comes into the human heart, it is to repair the injuries it has received from sin ; to raise it from the ruins of the fall ; to renew men in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of him who created them : for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away, and all things are become new. When Christ enters, he cleanses the thoughts of the heart, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit ; he makes them partakers of the divine nature ; and causes the spirit of glory, and of God to rest upon them. Thus he beautifies his sanctuary, and makes the place of his feet glorious.

When Christ became the guest of Zaccheus, he said, This day is salvation come to this house : and the same may be said, when he takes possession of the heart ; for he becomes the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him : and he furnishes whatever is requisite for its completion. His people receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace ; and thus draw water with joy from the wells of salvation. St. Paul reasons in this manner : He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things ? And the same argument holds good in the case before us : He that gives himself to his people, will he not impart unto them all the riches of his grace, and supply all their need ?

Christ does not come into the heart as a wayfaring man, that turns aside for a little time ; he comes to abide with his people ; he takes up his abode with them. The apostle says, Now I live ; but not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life that I live, is by

faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Christ makes his people his living temples; and gives them the tokens of his gracious presence; he manifests himself to them as he does not to the world; and they behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father; full of grace and truth.

One part of the promise is, I will sup with him: partake of his hospitality, as a pledge of his friendship. But it may be said, How is it possible for a sinner, to furnish a table for the entertainment of the Saviour? There was indeed a time when he could not have done this; when he might have said, I know that in me dwelleth no good thing, but only evil, and that continually. There was then nothing in the heart, which Christ could look upon with complacency and delight: but when the heart receives the Saviour, it has undergone a great moral change; the heart of stone has been turned to a heart of flesh; such persons are passed from death unto life; they hate sin, and set their affections on things above; their desires are unto God, and to the remembrance of his name; they live in his fear all the day long; and the Lord taketh great pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. They have a meek and a quiet spirit, which in God's sight are of great price. Their determination is to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in them, to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Such people have many gifts and graces of the Spirit, for the Saviour's entertainment. It is true, that all the grace they possess has been received from him; but he is not the less delighted with it on that account. In the change they have experienced, he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.

The more explicit part of the promise is, And he shall sup with me. Christ will give to such, the

bread that comes down from heaven, and fill their hearts with food and gladness. The provision which Infinite Mercy has made, for supplying the wants of immortal souls, and for promoting their happiness, is spoken of in scripture under the emblem of a feast or banquet. The prophet says, In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people, a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. Our Saviour compares the grace of the gospel to a marriage festival, made by a certain king, who sent his servants to invite the guests, and to say, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. When the Prodigal Son returned home, the father said to his servants, Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. In like manner, in the words before us, our Saviour declares that every returning sinner shall sup with him. This is to be understood of the communications of his grace and favour, to such as receive him; for he is made of God unto them wisdom, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He gives them earnest and foretastes of eternal life; and puts gladness into their hearts more than men rejoice when corn and wine increase. In this manner he leads them to his banqueting house, and his banner over them is love; they sit under his shadow with delight, and find his fruit is sweet to their taste.

To this feast of love and mercy, all are invited: for he says, If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he shall sup with me—whatever that man may be, as to his rank or condition; or whatever may have been his former conduct. It pleased God, that Christ should taste death for every man; and he is not willing that any should perish. He says, Look

unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.

Christ has procured for mankind all the riches of redeeming grace, and he entreats them to receive this inestimable treasure: but when he comes to knock at the door, he is often disregarded: some say, Go thy way at this time, and when I have a more convenient season, I will send for thee: others desire to be altogether excused; and others treat him with disdain and contempt, and cordially receive his implacable enemies. But he is not willing to give them up, but to save them from perdition; hence he stands at the door to knock. However the day of grace will terminate; and if the door of the heart is not opened to Christ, the door of mercy will be eternally shut. As it is written, Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; he shall answer and say unto you, Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.—The same for substance is stated in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins: When the bridegroom came, they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us: but he answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.—Therefore give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you have found an habitation in your hearts for Christ to dwell in. If you have opened the door to Christ, hold fast whereunto you have attained. Keep your-

selves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus to bring you to eternal life. Those who do this, will come to the marriage supper of the Lamb: he that sitteth in the midst of the throne shall feed them: he will give them to eat of the hidden manna, and the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. This will be the banquet above, which will always endure. And this future glory, as well as present grace, is promised, when he says, If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

SERMON III.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”
—1 PETER i. 2.

THIS apostle of Jesus Christ, addresses his epistle to the strangers scattered abroad, through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. By various wars and commotions, many of the Jews were become residents of these countries, and were often termed, children of the dispersion. At the time St. Peter wrote, most of them were natives of these regions; yet as they were at a great distance from the land of Israel, they were called strangers scattered abroad. But this might include the believing Gentiles, as well as the converted Jews, who set their affections on things above, and lived as strangers and pilgrims in the world: to which they were no longer conformed, but transformed by the renewing

of their minds. And as they were not of the world, having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, they were hated of the world; and persecuted for righteousness' sake: on which account they were often in heaviness through manifold temptations. Hence the apostle saw it needful to comfort and encourage them, that they might hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end: and for this purpose he sets before them, the privileges they possessed by embracing the gospel. He calls them, *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God*. The term, elect, is used in scripture in the sense of chosen; by which word it is often rendered in our version. It denotes any object of choice, selection, or preference: the scripture speaks of elect soldiers, elect chariots, elect fir trees, and elect sepulchres.

In a religious sense, the term, elect, was applied to the Jewish nation, as they were taken into covenant with God, enjoyed his laws and ordinances, and had inspired prophets and teachers, and were more favoured of heaven than any other people. As it is written, The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people to himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. On this account, they were called God's elect, or his chosen people.

The election of the Jews, to be God's church and people, was a kindness gratuitously bestowed; it was not obtained by any merit of their own; they were neither better nor greater than other nations, from whom they were so favourably distinguished: so that the preference granted to them, was an election of grace.

This election of the Jews, was no injury to any other people; it deprived them of no privilege which they previously possessed: God did not leave himself without witness in any nation. Those who were not in the Jewish covenant, might obtain the witness

that they pleased God, as was the case with Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Job, and Melchizedek. If any one incurred the divine displeasure, it was his own fault; for there is no unrighteousness with God. Hence Peter said, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. He is accepted according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not.

The election of the Jews, extended to the whole nation, without any discrimination. It made no difference between the righteous and the wicked; between them that served God, and them that served him not. Saul, was as truly elected as David. Even Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, were as really elected as Moses and Aaron. Some of the Jews were so disobedient and rebellious, that God swore in his wrath, they should not enter into his rest, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness; but all these were as truly elected, as Caleb and Joshua, who followed the Lord fully, and were brought to the promised land. Consequently, this election did not secure eternal life; for without holiness, no man can see the Lord.

The election of the Jews, was conditional; it might be forfeited by their sins, and taken from them for their punishment. Hence the Almighty says, Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: a blessing if ye will obey the commandments of the Lord; and a curse if you will not obey. Now, therefore if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. But if thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to do his commandments, all these curses shall come upon thee, till thou be destroyed.—The words of David, to Solomon, were applicable to every individual in the Jewish nation: Know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him

with a perfect heart, and a willing mind ; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. When the Jews rejected Christ, they ceased to be God's church and people : yet the apostle says God is able to graft them in again, if they continue not in unbelief. But an election that may be thus lost or gained, must be conditional.

Christians are termed elect, in the same sense, in which the Jews had that appellation. The apostles had been trained up in the Jewish church, and were accustomed to Jewish forms of speech : and in their writings, as might have been expected, they adopted the phraseology of the Old Testament ; they used the same language, in the same signification ; which they did with the strictest propriety : for when the Jews were become as branches broken off, Christians were engrafted into the same olive tree, to partake of its root and fatness. Hence the apostles termed the gospel church, Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. They addressed believers as a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and a peculiar people ; as those who are called, and chosen ; and as the election that had obtained the righteousness which is by faith.

Therefore, Christian election answers to that of the Jews ; it is obtained on the same terms, and has the same properties and qualifications. Christian election is the free gift of God : it comes from his unmerited favour and kindness. It is of grace, not of works, lest any man should boast. Christian election is not prejudicial to other people, but for their advantage ; for Christians are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. Christ says to his followers, Freely ye have received, freely give : that is, diffuse the light of the gospel, till all become one fold under one shepherd. Christian election extends to every individual of the community, whatever

be their moral deportment. In the words before us, St. Peter applies the term elect, to all who professed the Christian religion, in all the various nations mentioned ; but this could not imply, that they were all either truly righteous here, or would be saved hereafter : for the gospel kingdom is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind ; which when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So there is always a mixture of good and bad, in the church below : but whatever be their moral state, every member of the Christian community is elected. Our Saviour said to his apostles, Have I not chosen you twelve ? that is, have I not elected you ? and one of you is a devil. So that Judas himself, was as much elected as the other apostles. Some of the Corinthians were carnal in their conversation, but still they were elect. We read of some, who after they had escaped the corruptions which are in the world, through the knowledge of Christ, were again entangled therein ; and their last state was worse than the first. But these, while they continued members of the church, were as truly elected, as those who continued grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. But an election so extensive as this, can only be to church privileges ; it does not determine men's final state ; for that is made to depend on real holiness of heart and life.

Christian election is likewise conditional. The fall of the Jewish church is urged as a warning to Christians ; lest they should fall after the same example of unbelief. St. Paul, speaking on this subject, says, Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith ; be not high-minded, but fear ; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee. Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God : on them that fell,

severity ; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in goodness : otherwise thou shalt be cut off. —On this ground, believers are exhorted to make their calling and election sure.

By election, people enjoy all the privileges of the gospel ; and those who make a proper use of them, will be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light. And if such hold fast whereunto they have attained, they will be elected to eternal felicity : and this is an election which all may obtain : for Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man ; and says, Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Election, in the words before us, is stated to be *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. The connexion in which this clause stands, evinces, that it is intended to comfort and encourage believers ; but how can this be done by their election being foreknown to God, since every other thing is equally foreknown, and are no better on that account ? Therefore, it is not the simple prescience of the Divine Being, that is here intended, but his good pleasure. The term in scripture rendered know, is not confined to intelligence : it likewise denotes approbation : as where it is said, The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous ; but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Our Saviour will say to some, at the great day of accounts, Depart from me, I know you not. This cannot signify that he was unacquainted with them, for he knows all things : the meaning is, that such persons had not his favour and affection. In like manner, foreknowledge sometimes denotes previous approbation. In this sense, St. Paul says, God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew : that is, of whom he had approved, in former time ; for in no other way, could his foreknowledge of them, be a reason for not casting them away. So in the words before us, fore-

knowledge denotes previous approbation. And for believers to know, that their worship and service are pleasing to God, is a source of great encouragement. At that time Christianity was a sect every where spoken against; the Jews in particular reprobated it; as it differed so materially from their temple services; without which they thought none could be saved. Hence it was needful for the apostle to show, that gospel worship and service was approved in heaven. As a proof of this, he states, that it had greatly engaged the attention of the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. In this grace then they might stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. For who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?

This election is stated to be *through sanctification of the Spirit*. It might seem by this, that these people were sanctified first, and elected on that account: and this would have been the case, if the apostle had been speaking of an election to eternal life: for none can be appointed to heaven, who are not first made holy. But the apostle is speaking of an election to church privileges, which are not preceded by sanctification, but are intended to produce it. St. Paul says, God has chosen us, that we should be holy: and St. Peter here intends the same thing; his words may be properly rendered, *Elect in order to sanctification*: denoting that gospel ordinances, were intended to lead them to holiness of heart and life. Hence he says, As he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. All the doctrines of the gospel are adapted to cleanse the heart, from evil thoughts and impure desires. It contains great and precious promises, by which men are to be made partakers of the divine nature. Hence when St. Paul was sent to preach the gospel, he says, he was sent to turn men from darkness to

light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified. If the gospel does not make men holy, its design is frustrated ; and men receive the grace of God in vain : and in this case Christ will profit them nothing. So that all who are called of God, are called to be saints ; or in other words, elected to sanctification.

This is here termed the sanctification of the *Spirit* ; to distinguish it from mere outward and ceremonial purification. Under the law, there was the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, which sanctified to the purifying of the flesh : but this might leave the heart carnal, and sold under sin. But Christian sanctification is spiritual ; the spirit of man is the subject of it ; according to the promise, I will give you a new heart, and renew a right spirit within you. Such are made spiritually-minded, which is life and peace. They have a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. They are created anew in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of Him who created them. That mind is in them which was in Christ. But the apostle likewise terms this the sanctification of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit of God is the agent or operating cause of it. The whole Trinity co-operate in the work of redemption : on this account, believers are said to be elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and sprinkled by the blood of Christ. Each person in the Godhead performs a distinguished part : and the work of the Holy Spirit is our sanctification. The apostle says, Ye are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All who are regenerated, are born of the Spirit : the Spirit convinces men of sin, which produces repentance, which is unto life. The Spirit produces faith in Christ, which

purifies the heart; it enables men to mortify the deeds of the body; so that those who walk after the Spirit, will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; and this is equally true of every other gracious disposition, and heavenly temper. All the holy principles in the hearts of God's people, are the fruits of his Spirit. It transforms believers into his own likeness. We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. As you cannot be saved without sanctification, nor sanctified without the Holy Spirit, pray that it may be shed on you abundantly. If men who are evil, know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more will your heavenly Father, give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Cherish its influences: and by no means grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

This election and sanctification are *unto obedience*. They are intended to produce this happy result; to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise and glory of God. The apostle says, Whom God did foreknow, he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; and those who are conformed to Christ, will walk as he also walked. Those who are made new creatures, will walk in newness of life. They are God's workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained, that they should walk in them. —In the words before us, it is not stated to whom this obedience is to be yielded; but as they are the words of an apostle, it is evident that obedience to God is intended. He is the creator and preserver of man, the lawgiver and judge of the world; and has therefore an absolute and unalienable right to man's obedience. Men owe obedience to all God's com-

mands, obedience to the whole extent of their powers, and throughout the whole course of their lives. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. There can be no substitute for obedience; for to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams. Obedience is equally requisite under the gospel, for we are not without law to God, but under the law to Christ; who is become the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him; and will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel. He exhorts his followers to let their light so shine before men, that others may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in heaven. He maintained that without obedience none could be saved: his words are these, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Whoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, that built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. Surely the apostles could not preach a different doctrine. They could say nothing to encourage disobedience, if properly understood. They declared that the wrath of God was revealed from heaven, against all unrighteousness of men; and that his wrath would come on the children of disobedience. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but keeping the commandments of God; who will render to every man according to the deeds done in the body. Be not deceived; God will not be mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Let no man deceive you; he that committeth sin is of the devil: he that doeth righteousness is righteous. Wilt thou know, O vain

man, that faith without works is dead. Hence we may see the necessity of gospel obedience; and we may likewise see the advantage of it; for God's commands are not grievous but joyous, and in keeping of them there is great reward. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. In this respect, believers can do nothing of themselves; but they can do all things through Christ strengthening them.

Another Christian privilege, is the *sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*. In these words, there is an allusion to what was done under the old dispensation. Under the law, almost all things were purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood there was no remission. The High Priest sprinkled the mercy seat, to take away sin. This was an emblem of what was afterwards done by the great High Priest of our profession, who by his death on the cross, made an atonement for sin, by which a believer obtains forgiveness with God. So that by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ is to be understood, the benefits of his cross and passion; the application of his merits and grace, by which believers obtain remission of sins, and are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.

But some who may acquiesce in the exposition now given of the various particulars, here enumerated, may think there is a difficulty in the arrangement; as the apostle puts sanctification and obedience, before the meritorious cause of justification; and it may be thought, that the last should have stood first. But there is perhaps no arrangement of these particulars, that will in all respects correspond with Christian experience. On this account it may be requisite to have different arrangements, that the defects of one, may be supplied by the other. In

christian experience, justification is received before sanctification is completed ; hence it is so far proper to speak of sanctification, as a subsequent blessing. But on the other hand, it is to be remembered, that men always experience a measure of sanctification, before they are justified ; on this account it may be proper on some occasions, to place it the first ; as St. Paul does when writing to the Corinthians, where he says, Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God ? and such were some of you ; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified. This is the order followed in the words before us. And we are now to consider the use that is to be made of this arrangement.

It is to teach us, that God never justifies the wicked ; that is, never while they continue in their wickedness. Sin is never pardoned till it be confessed and forsaken, and a new course of life commenced. The scripture says, Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well. He that hideth his sins shall not prosper ; but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God for he will abundantly pardon. St. Peter says, Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out. Repentance, which is a godly sorrow for sin, springing from an abhorrence of it, is one branch of regeneration, consequently it is a part of sanctification. To be converted is to lead a new life, and be devoted to God. And this is what is required, in order that sin may be blotted out. Yet this blessing can only be obtained through the merits of Christ.

Those who have repented, have taken a very important step in the way to the kingdom ; for they have turned unto the Lord with a broken spirit and

a contrite heart : they have forsaken every evil way, and turned their feet unto God's testimonies, and attend to every religious ordinance ; for those who repent will do works meet for repentance : but they are not thereby justified ; present obedience, however perfect, cannot take away the guilt of past transgressions ; neither in whole nor in part. So that without a free pardon, they still remain under the curse of a broken law ; and have a fearful looking for of judgement. When David had both confessed and forsaken his sins, and at the remembrance of them, mingled his drink with his weeping, and watered his couch with his tears, his guilt remained as a burden too heavy to bear : on this account his cry was, For thy name's sake O Lord, pardon mine iniquity though it is great. And for the attainment of this blessing, we are directed to the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. St. Paul says, God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ; that is a propitiatory sacrifice, to take away sin, that we may be justified through the redemption there is in Christ : delivered from condemnation through the ransom he has paid, when he suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God. But what Christ has done is only available through faith. So that when a sinner is brought to say, What must I do to be saved ? the answer is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins ; and by him all that believe are justified. Therefore, let every penitent exercise confidence in Christ, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He that believeth is passed from death unto life ; his burden of guilt is removed, and he obtains acceptance with God. So that he can walk in the light of his countenance, rejoice in his name all the day, and in his righteousness he is exalted.

To this the apostle adds, *Grace unto you, and*

peace be multiplied. This is an apostolical benediction. Grace may denote the influences and fruits of the Spirit; the favour and protection of God, and a meetness for heaven; all these may be called grace, as they spring from unmerited kindness, and are gratuitously bestowed by the Father of mercies. Peace may denote that serenity of mind, which those possess, who have a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins: which is a peace that passeth understanding; and which the world can neither give nor take away. The apostle desired that this might be multiplied to them; that they might abound therein more and more: that the God of peace himself, might give them peace, always, by all means: that he would grant them this peace according to the riches of his glory; that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they might know his love which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God.

As those who embrace the gospel are styled elect, it shows they are a people highly favoured of the Lord; lines are fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have a goodly heritage. The apostle says, they are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God; to the church of the first born, which are written in heaven: to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. For these privileges be thankful; and walk worthy of that vocation wherewith ye are called, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, in all things. All these privileges have corresponding obligations, for where much is given, much is required: then what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?

Those who embrace the gospel are elect, in order to sanctification and obedience; that is to holiness of heart and life; which is not only their privilege, but likewise their indispensable duty. For how can

they escape if they neglect so great salvation. Therefore rest not without purity of heart; that being made free from sin, you may be the servants of God, having your fruit unto holiness, and your end eternal life. Look for the coming of the day of God, and give all diligence, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

In order to attain this happy consummation, let your conversation be as becometh the gospel. This then is the message which we have heard, and declare unto you, That God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. And if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

SERMON IV.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”—1. TIM. i. 15.

TIMOTHY was counted worthy to be put in trust with the gospel; and at the time this epistle was written, he was presiding over the church at Ephesus; where the truth was assailed, both from without and from within: on this account there was the more need of his exemplary piety, his vigorous exertions, and all his prudence and discretion. St. Paul gave him much instruction, that he might know how to behave himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. According to the directions given him, he was to study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing

the word of truth. He was to do the work of an evangelist; which included proper regulations, the administration of the ordinances, and the preaching of the gospel. As to the gospel, the sum and substance of it is contained in these words, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

But in what manner, it may be asked, was Christ qualified for this great work? If he was no more than a great, and a good man, he would not have been able to save sinners. Many such men have appeared in the world, but none of them could redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.— Christ had in all things the pre-eminence; he was a greater prophet than Moses, a greater priest than Aaron, and a greater king than David; but even this does not prove him to be more than a man, for one human being may be more excellent than another, as one star differs from another star in glory.— But Christ must have been more than a man, because he had an existence in heaven, before he came into the world. He had a glory with the Father before the world was; he was in the beginning with God. But his pre-existent state does not of itself, prove him to be superior to the angels in heaven; for some angelic being might have assumed human nature, if it had pleased the Almighty. But St. Paul declares, that Christ is much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they: for unto which of the angels hath God said at any time, Thou art my son, to-day have I begotten thee? and when he bringeth the first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him. He might however be superior to the angels, and yet a finite being. But the scriptures teach that Christ was possessed of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness; that he was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is therefore

well qualified to save sinners ; and for this end came he into the world.

He came into the world, by the assumption of human nature ; which he took into union with the divine nature ; and was God manifest in the flesh. Having engaged to set his followers an example by his life, and to give himself a ransom by his death on the cross, it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren ; hence he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, and appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh.

He came into the world, under such circumstances, as the prophets had predicted : he came of the tribe of Judah, of the house and lineage of David ; he was born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem.—He came at the time which had been foretold by the prophets. Jacob had said, The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come. At the birth of Christ, Judah had held the sceptre for fifteen hundred years ; soon after this the sceptre departed from Judah ; and to the present day, Judah has no ensign of civil power, or regal dominion. Daniel foretold that the Messiah should appear at the end of seventy weeks, this taken in the prophetic style, as the Jews understood it, a day for a year, was almost five hundred years : and this corresponded with the birth of Christ, in the days of Herod the king. According to the prophets, Christ was to come to the Temple at Jerusalem, and fill it with his glory ; so as to make it more glorious than the former temple ; which he did, when he honoured it with his presence. But the Jews have had no temple for the space of about eighteen hundred years : so that if Christ had not appeared at that time, the prophecies could not have been accomplished. But the apostle says, When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son. It was the fulness of time with respect to prophecy, and what infinite wisdom saw to be the most suitable

period in other respects. If human reason had been consulted, a much earlier period would have been fixed upon, for the manifestation of Christ; but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; yet his judgement is always according to truth. For the appearance of Christ at that late period, there might be many reasons which we cannot discover; and some reasons we may be able to perceive; or some advantages arising from it. Up to this period, the evil of sin had been evinced by the enormities it had committed, and the devastations it had produced; and by all the calamities it had inflicted on the world; hence might be seen the need and value of a Saviour, who could destroy the works of the devil; and turn the hearts of the disobedient unto the wisdom of the just; who could make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in an everlasting righteousness. — Previous to our Saviour's advent, human reason had full scope for the development of its powers, and for making all the discoveries in religion of which it was capable; and the result was, the evidence of its own weakness, and the absolute need of a divine revelation; for the world by wisdom knew not God. Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Destruction and misery were in their ways, and the way of peace they knew not. The only remedy for this was, for the Sun of righteousness to arise upon the world with healing on his wings. — Before the coming of Christ, the ceremonial law had been in full operation among the Jews, from the time of Moses; but the experience of fifteen hundred years, discovered that it was inadequate either to justify or sanctify sinners; for the law made nothing perfect; its oblations could not take away sin. From this it appeared how requisite it was, to have a greater high priest, who could offer a more efficacious sacrifice, and set up a more perfect tabernacle; or in other words, bring in a better covenant; established upon better promises. — Previous

to the Saviour's advent, learning and philosophy had been successfully cultivated, and widely diffused; and civil government was in the plenitude of power. Had Christ come in the rude ages of the world, it might have been supposed, that Christianity was indebted for its reception and progress, to the credulity of mankind, and the weakness of their civil institutions. But at the time the gospel kingdom was set up, men were well able to judge of the evidence of those facts which were laid before them; and they had power to oppose the introduction of a new religion, to which they felt an utter aversion. So that when the gospel prevailed against all the learning of Greece, and all the power of imperial Rome, it was evidently the work of God.—Before the birth of Christ, predictions relating to his advent, had been published in the various regions of the earth; which excited among both Jews and Gentiles, an ardent expectation of his appearing at that period; by this means many were prepared for his reception, and others were left without excuse. At the birth of Christ, by the extension of the Roman Empire over the civilized world, a more effectual door was opened for the spread of the gospel, than at any former period. On these accounts it might be said, he came in the fulness of time; in that time which was the fittest and the best.

Christ Jesus came into the world, meek and lowly. The apostle says, He became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. He had no visible wealth or splendour; he had none of the honour that cometh from men: he was born in a stable, and laid in a manger. He dwelt at Nazareth, as the carpenter's son; and had no associates above the fishermen of Galilee. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and after he commenced his public ministry, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs; and could say, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of

man hath nowhere to lay his head. In this manner he humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation; and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

But notwithstanding the deep humiliation and abasement of Christ, yet he came into the world, with evident tokens of his heavenly descent. An extraordinary harbinger, was sent before him to prepare his way, and announce his approach; a host of angels celebrated his nativity, and sang, Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good-will to men. A new star arose in the firmament, to conduct the wise men from the east to Bethlehem, that they might worship the new-born king. The spirit of prophecy, which had departed from the temple, for the space of four hundred years, returned, when Mary presented her infant in that place; and inspired Simeon to exclaim, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation; which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. His mighty works showed forth his glory; by these it was seen, that he was a teacher come from God, for no man could do the miracles which he did, except God was with him. On the Mount of Transfiguration, his countenance shone like the sun; and his raiment was white as the light: Moses and Elias appeared talking with him; while a voice from heaven proclaimed, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. When he hung upon the cross, the sun was darkened, the earth did quake, the rocks rent, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose: so that his enemies were constrained to say, Truly this man was the Son of God! And the language of his disciples was, We beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

Christ came into the world, fully aware of the base treatment he was to receive, and of all the sufferings he had to endure. St. Peter says, He suffered according to the counsel of God : and with that counsel, he was perfectly acquainted : there was nothing that was not manifest in his sight. He knew all things : he knew what it would cost to ransom immortal souls, and answer all the demands of a broken law. When his disciples apprehended no danger, and probably contemplated the setting up of a temporal kingdom, he told them he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the chief priests, and be put to death : for they would smite the shepherd, and the sheep should be scattered. He had a prospect of all the horrors of his crucifixion ; yet such was his regard for the human race, that he left the realms of bliss, and entered on the doleful scene, and drank the bitter cup.

Christ came into the world, to suffer for sinners, of his own consent, and voluntary engagement. When Jewish sacrifices could not avail, he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.—The apostle says, that Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity. And he himself makes this declaration, I lay down my life of myself, no man taketh it from me : I am the good shepherd that give my life for the sheep. When he was betrayed into the hands of sinners, he had all power in heaven and in earth ; the armies of heaven were at his command, by which his enemies might have been consumed in a moment ; but he said then, How should the scriptures be fulfilled ? those prophecies which spake of his sufferings, and of the glory that should follow. That these things might be fulfilled, he willingly submitted to his death on the cross. Unless the sufferings of Christ had been the result of his own voluntary act and deed, they could have made no satisfaction to divine justice ; they could have afforded no mani-

festation of his love to the world ; and he himself could not have been crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death. But Christ was not merely the devoted victim, he was both the offering and the priest : he offered himself without spot to God, that he might put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Christ Jesus came into the world, with the full approbation and authority of God the Father. There is such union and concurrence between the Father and the Son, that all men are to honour the Son, as they honour the Father ; and he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father that sent him. Though Christ devoted himself to the work of redemption, yet this detracts nothing from the love and authority of God the Father. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering. For this purpose, God spared not his own Son ; but delivered him up for us all. In this manner Christ Jesus came into the world.

He came into the world, to save sinners : this was the merciful design of his mission. He did not come to inflict indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, as the guilty sons of Adam had a right to expect : For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through him might be saved.

It is only as men are sinners, that they can be interested in the mission of Christ ; for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. But the scripture declares, that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Sin is the transgression of the law ; and when the requirements of the divine law, are compared with the hearts and lives of men, the whole world will stand convicted

before God : for there is none righteous, no not one. And it is written, The soul that sinneth it shall die. The day is approaching, when vengeance will be taken on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. But mankind may be delivered from going down to the pit, for there is found out a ransom. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. His name is called Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins.

The question here is, By what means does he accomplish salvation ? This is a much disputed point. Some contend that he saves sinners by the doctrine he taught, and the good example which he set, and by laying down his life to confirm the truth. There is no doubt but these things exert a powerful influence on the hearts and lives of his people ; but if he did nothing more, why was his coming into the world so indispensable ? as other persons might have done these things. And why is he regarded as the only saviour of sinners ? St. Paul preached the same doctrine, and behaved himself holily, justly, and unblameably ; and at last sealed the truth with his blood : but neither Paul, nor any other apostle, prophet, or martyr, is ever said to come into the world to save sinners ; they are never said to make reconciliation for iniquity ; their blood is never said to cleanse from sin, or to justify a sinner before God. With respect to the martyrs it is declared, that they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Notwithstanding all the blood which they shed, they were so far from cleansing other people from sin, that they needed cleansing themselves, in the only fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. From this it follows, that Christ saves sinners in a way that no other person ever did, or ever could do.

If Christ saves men by his precepts and example only, how did he save those who died under the old dispensation? To them he was promised as a Saviour; and those who were truly pious, saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them; so that they lived and died in faith. But they could receive no benefit from the Saviour's instruction or example; yet as he was, in the purpose of God, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, he was as much the Redeemer of the Old Testament saints, as he is of those of the New Testament. And they will all unite in heaven, to fall down before the Lamb, and to sing this new song, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. By this it appears, that the way in which Christ undertook to save sinners, was by making an atonement for sin, by his death on the cross. He bare our iniquities in his body on the tree, that by his stripes ye might be healed. We all like sheep had gone astray; and God laid on him the iniquities of us all. He made his soul an offering for sin: his people are bought with a price: they are redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.

It may be asked, Of what description is that salvation which Christ has obtained for sinners? To this it may be replied, That it is free; it is without any merit on the part of man. Otherwise it would not discover the infinite mercy and goodness of the Divine Being. Unless it was free, it would be out of the reach of mortal man; for there is no merit in his best performances. Can a man profit God? Those who serve God to the best of their abilities, are to confess, that they are unprofitable servants.

To offer salvation in a way, in which it could not be accepted, would neither be honourable to God, nor profitable to men ; and if it is offered so that it may be received, then it is the free gift of God, according to the riches of his grace. So that the most weak, and the most unworthy may obtain it ; for it is adapted to man's fallen state. But this salvation is not unconditional, otherwise all would be saved, which is not the case ; and therefore there is reason to fear, falling short of it ; for how can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? After all that Christ has suffered on the cross, Except ye repent, ye shall all perish. He that covereth his sin shall not prosper ; but he that confesseth and forsaketh, shall find mercy. But repentance and confession of sin, however deep and sincere, discharge no part of the debt contracted by a violation of the divine law. The blessing is promised in answer to prayer ; Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. But men do not merit forgiveness by asking for it ; whatever is obtained in answer to prayer, is a free gift.—Of Christ give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins : but he that believeth not is condemned already ; because he has not believed in the only begotten of the Father. But however indispensable faith may be, it detracts nothing from the freeness of gospel grace ; for the apostle declares, That men are saved by faith, that it might be by grace, not of works lest any man should boast. Not by acts of righteousness which we have done, but of his mercy he saveth us. Therefore whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.

Christ saves sinners with a present salvation. His saving grace was not confined to his manifestation in the flesh, it equally belongs to all succeeding

generations, and of course to the people of the present day. It is not limited to one temple, or one city, it is to be found in every region; our Saviour says, Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Gospel salvation is not only some benefit to be hoped for hereafter, it is likewise to be possessed in the present world. It is not only to prepare men to die the death of the righteous; it also enables them to live the life of the righteous. It is not confined to acceptance in the day of judgement; it gives men now the testimony that they please God, and are accepted with him. It does not merely give the prospect of a future kingdom, for Christ says, My kingdom is within you: this is a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost. This salvation does not exclusively belong to a time of sickness and old age; it is for the time of health and strength; and for the season of youth; as it is written, Those who seek me early shall find me. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness. It does not require to be long waited for, after men see and feel their need of it; For all things are now ready. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Therefore, to-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Christ saves sinners, with a full salvation. He is able to save unto the uttermost. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; both as to justification and sanctification. By the forgiveness of sins, he removes all guilt and condemnation, and fills the heart with peace and joy in believing. He cleanseth his people from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that they may perfect holiness in the fear of God. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all are become new: he is made a partaker of the divine nature, renewed in the image of God. The law of the spirit of life, that is

in Christ Jesus, makes men free from the law of sin and death; and being made free from sin, they become the servants of God; having their fruit unto holiness, and their end eternal life. They are a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Christ supplies all their need; he is their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption: they receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace. In every temptation, he makes a way for their escape; they can do all things through Christ strengthening them. Nay, in all things they are more than conquerors through him that has loved them. They are brought to the enjoyment of God, which is a happiness commensurate to all the powers of an immortal soul. Hence to you that believe, Christ is precious; and with exultation you will say, Thou art all my salvation, and all my desire.

Christ saves sinners, with an everlasting salvation. The apostle says, He learned obedience by what he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him. All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever; and such is the duration of gospel salvation. Christ gives his people eternal life, and they shall never perish: he will raise them up at the last day, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Because he lives, they shall live also: and in his presence is fulness of joys, and pleasures for evermore.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.—It is a faithful saying, as it contains the most important truth that was ever divulged. Its truth, is proved by the testimony of the apostles and evangelists, who in their statements, could not be deceived themselves, and could have no motive to deceive others. No man ever laid down his life, to

prove a statement to be true, which he knew to be false. The truth of the gospel is proved by the miracles which were wrought for its confirmation; by the fulfilment of prophecy; and by its propagation in the world, all circumstances considered; and likewise by the superiority of its doctrines, over all human productions. Moreover, he that believeth hath the witness in himself. To such the gospel comes not in word only, but with power, by the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance. As it is true, it is entitled to acceptance: and this is required on the part of man, in order that he may participate in its benefits. Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. His call to the sons of men, is stated in these words, Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.—The gospel is worthy of universal acceptance, however diversified the human family may be. The apostle says, I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise; so much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also; for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. If Christ had only died for a part of mankind, he could have had no claim to the acceptance of the other part: but he gave himself a ransom for all; he tasted death for every man; and says, Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out. Hence the gospel deserves the acceptance of every nation, and people, and tongue; of high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. Because all have immortal souls; all are involved in condem-

nation; and there is no name given under heaven, by which they can be saved, but the name of Christ: and he is a Saviour all complete; and is given to be the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

All acceptation, of which the declaration before us is worthy, is not to be understood of universal acceptance only, it likewise denotes the most cordial reception, of which men are capable; including their full consent, their whole desires, their undivided hearts. It is like a treasure hid in a field, which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. He counts all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. The gospel, contained in the words before us, is the revelation which God has given of his Son; of all the unsearchable riches of his grace; of all the plenitude of spiritual blessings in heavenly places. So that it is glad tidings of great joy to all people; it announceth pardon to the guilty, liberty to the captive, rest to the weary, health to the sick, life to the dead, and salvation to the lost. Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk O Lord in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. It is therefore worthy of all acceptation.

Hence appears the sin and folly of rejecting it; yet it is rejected; St. Paul declares, that all have not obeyed the gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? All who violate its precepts, reject it; whatever creed they may profess. They will not come to Christ that they may have life; they go out of the way of understanding, and remain in the congregation of the dead. They grieve God at his heart; hence he says, I have called, and ye have refused: all the day long, I have stretched out my hand, to a disobedient and gainsaying people. Such people in effect declare, they will not have Christ to

reign over them ; they reject the counsel of God, and do despite to the spirit of grace. They are therefore in the way to perdition ; where their greatest anguish and distress, will arise from rejecting him, who came into the world to save sinners. That this may not be the portion of your cup, seek the Lord while he may be found ; call upon him while he is near.

Some, who give full credit to this gracious declaration, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, are still involved in doubts and fears ; they have such a sense of their manifold offences, that they are afraid they can never obtain forgiveness. This is a very distressing and a very groundless apprehension ; for where there is repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest transgressions will be blotted out. Paul says, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious ; and the chief of sinners. Howbeit, I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. — Let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Let those who have counted the gospel worthy of their acceptance, walk worthy of that vocation wherewith they are called ; adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour. Of such Christ will say, They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. As they are justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, they will be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy.

SERMON V.

“Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.—PHIL. ii. 12, 13.

PHILIPPI, a city of Macedonia, was the first place in Europe, which heard and received the gospel of Christ; here Paul and Silas magnified their office; by making it manifest, that they were the servants of the most high God, who show unto men the way of salvation. At this city, for some time, Paul took up his abode; and a Christian church was established; where the gospel was proclaimed, and its ordinances administered. These Christian privileges, lay men under an obligation to Christian duties. So that those who have the word of truth, are to be exhorted, not to receive the grace of God in vain; but to give diligence, to make their calling and election sure. This is what the apostle urges on the Philippians, when he says, Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling.

Salvation, denotes a deliverance from great evil and danger, especially when the alternative is, to be saved or destroyed. When Israel were pursued by their enemies, to the borders of the Red Sea, and there appeared to be no way for their escape, Moses, confident that divine power would be exerted for their safety, said, Stand still, and see the salvation of God. This they saw in a happy and wonderful deliverance: yet this was only a temporal deliverance. But that salvation, of which the apostle speaks

in the words before us, is spiritual ; a deliverance from spiritual evils ; including the gift of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. This is called gospel salvation ; for the gospel reveals it, and freely offers it for man's acceptance ; and is instrumental in its application. Hence the apostle says, I am not ashamed of the gospel ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. This salvation belongs both to this life, and that which is to come. As it respects this life, it is a deliverance from sin, and the evils which sin produces. The name of Christ, is Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins. He forgiveth all their iniquities ; he cleanseth them from all unrighteousness ; that being made free from sin, they may be the servants of God, having their fruit unto holiness, and their end eternal life. And those who are thus justified and sanctified, are in a state of salvation. But there is likewise a future salvation ; for believers are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Christ once suffered for sin ; and to them that look for him, he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation : for he is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him. This will be a deliverance from all the trials and conflicts of the present life ; those that die in the Lord, rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. It will be a deliverance from death and the grave ; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. It will deliver the soul from going down to the pit, for there is found out a ransom.—Future salvation will include eternal glory and blessedness ; all that God has laid up for them that love him. In his presence is fulness of joys ; and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. The grace which believers receive on earth, and the glory they will receive in heaven, are called salvation ; in reference to the evil and danger from which they are released. The happiness which

Adam had in paradise, was not salvation, as it was not a deliverance from any previous evil: the same remark applies to the happiness of angels in heaven; but the conducting of men to glory, is their salvation; as it is a deliverance from sin, death, and hell. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. While men live in sin, they are so far lost, that the wrath of God abideth on them; and their doom is to be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. But God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. Thus the salvation of man is rendered attainable; and it should be the great concern of mankind not to suffer Christ to die in vain; for how shall they escape, if they neglect so great salvation? Lest any should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, the apostle saw it needful to give this exhortation, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Yet it may be supposed, that it is above men's capability, to work out their own salvation. So indeed it would be, if they were left to their own energies, without any aid from above; but these words of our Saviour, My grace is sufficient for thee; are applicable to all mankind; for his grace is free for all: if any have not a sufficiency of it, it is their own fault. It is written, When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Here is stated both man's own helplessness, and the provision that is made to supply him with strength. Because Christ gave himself a ransom for all, a measure of the Spirit is given to every man; and that Spirit giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, it increaseth strength: and this strength is adequate to all that the precepts of the gospel require. So that those who can do nothing of themselves, can do all things through Christ strengthening them.

But when it is understood, that through the aid of divine grace, a man is able to work out his own salvation, it may be pleaded, that there is no need to do this; because St. Paul says, To him that worketh not, faith is counted for righteousness. So that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law: and he gives an instance of this in the case of Abraham. But by this instance, his meaning may be understood; the works Abraham did not perform, were the ceremonial institutions of Moses. He did not neglect moral duties. The apostle holds him up as an example of obedience to God, with which the Almighty was so well pleased, as to say, Abraham, I am thy shield; and thy exceeding great reward. If the apostle ever intended to say, that a man is accepted of God, without moral works, he could only mean without the merit of works. And we are to be fully persuaded that there is no merit in human works: Can a man profit God? Not by acts of righteousness which we have done, but of his mercy he saveth us; for by grace are ye saved, not of works lest any man should boast. So the apostle shows, that ceremonial works are not requisite: and that there is no merit in moral works; but he could never affirm that religious exercises are not necessary; because he showed, that in order to forgiveness of sins, men were to turn to God, and to do works meet for repentance. For it is only he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, that is accepted with him. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Know thou the God of thy father; and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. Our Saviour says, Labour, or as it should have been rendered, Work for the meat which endureth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you. The apostle only puts this into other words, when he says, Work out your own salvation.

There is the work of consideration. Those who neglect this duty, neglect all the rest; they have not God in all their thoughts. When the Jews were a sinful nation, it is said, My people do not consider; they have forsaken the Lord; they have provoked the holy one of Israel. When Moses was anxious for the salvation of Israel, he exclaimed, Oh! that they were wise; that they would consider their latter end! It should be considered that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgement; that the dust shall return to the dust, and the spirit shall go to God who gave it; who will render to every man according to the deeds done in the body; whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. This will either be everlasting happiness, or everlasting misery. It should be considered that time is short, and life uncertain; and at death the night cometh when no man can work; there is no work, nor device, in the grave: as the tree falls, so it lies: those who die unrighteous, must be unrighteous still: then a great ransom cannot deliver them. It should be considered that God is not willing that any should perish; he is gracious and merciful; and the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will he not with him freely give us all things?

There is the work of self-examination. Let a man examine himself whether he be in the faith. The question is not whether he professes faith, but whether he has it in his possession; and whether it be genuine faith: a faith that obtains peace with God: a faith that works by love, that purifies the heart, and overcometh the world: a faith that relies on the promises, and produces obedience to the precepts of the gospel: a faith that realises an invisible world; being the substance of things hoped for; and the evidence of things not seen. If this, on examination,

is not found to be your state, you are weighed in the balances, and found wanting.

But there is the work of repentance. As it is written, Repent, and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out. Repentance is a godly sorrow for sin; such as those have who hate sin and flee from it. This springs from divine grace; hence God is said to give repentance: but the exercise of this grace is man's duty. On this account God commands all men to repent; and declares that those who do not shall perish. And he promises that those who repent shall find mercy. David resolved to repent, when he said, I will be sorry for my sin. And this is what all sinners should be resolved to do: therefore rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord, for he is gracious and merciful. Repentance is so important a step in the way to the kingdom, that there is joy in the presence of the angels, over one sinner that repenteth.

There is the work of bringing forth fruit, meet for repentance. If it did not bring forth good fruit, it would neither please God, nor profit the soul. Those who are sorry for their sins, must confess and forsake them; for he that hideth his sin shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy: yet this mercy must be sought by earnest prayer and supplication; of which we have an example in the publican, when he smote upon his breast, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner.

There is the work of faith; of faith in Christ. This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he has sent. When the keeper of the prison at Philippi, was convinced of his sin and danger, he came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, Sirs, what shall I do to be saved? and they replied, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. This equally applies to every true penitent. Let such behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away

the sin of the world ; and by a firm reliance on his merits and grace, they will obtain acceptance with God. For of Christ give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.

There is the work of a holy life. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for the appearing of Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

That it is requisite to perform all these exercises, will not be disputed ; but it may be asked, how men by these performances, can be said, to work out their own salvation ? The reason is, because God is pleased to save sinners in this way, and in no other. His word states the terms on which sin is to be forgiven, and the divine favour obtained ; and those who will not comply with the terms must perish, because they obey not the gospel. But those who do comply with the stipulated conditions, are thereby entitled to the promises of mercy and grace ; they are made the sons of God, and heirs of heaven. In this sense they work out their own salvation.

The manner of doing this work, is with fear and trembling. Fear is an apprehension of something disastrous, either in the loss of what is good, or the infliction of what is evil. Fear is either religious or irreligious. The wicked have tormenting fears ; as the devils believe and tremble. Of religious fears there is a wide difference. Among those who engage in religious duties, the apostle terms some servants, and others sons of God ; and the former have a servile, and the latter a filial fear. St. John says, there is no fear in love ; for perfect love casteth out fear : but he is speaking of a fear that has torment in it ; not of a truly pious fear, for this abides

with those who dwell in love, and dwell in God. The fear of God is a permanent principle of true religion; it mingles with all acceptable obedience; as it is written, Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence, and a godly fear. The Psalmist says, Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling; which corresponds with the exhortation in the words before us, Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling.

The fear recommended, is not opposed to confidence in the divine veracity, sufficiency, and immutability; for when Abraham was strong in faith, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thine only son. The fear recommended, is not that diffidence, which induces men to neglect religion rather than suffer for it. Many of the Jewish rulers believed in Christ, but durst not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. So there are many at the present day, who do not acknowledge Christ, because they dare not face a frowning world. Were they to be decidedly religious, they are afraid, they would forfeit their reputation, be injured in their temporal circumstances, and would raise up foes in their own household, and have all manner of evil spoken of them falsely. But those who have a truly pious fear, are not afraid of doing their duty, on account of what men may do unto them; they are afraid of neglecting their duty, lest it should incur the divine displeasure. They are afraid to commit sin, because God is of purer eyes than to behold it without indignation. This fear produces vigilance and caution, to let their conversation be as becometh the gospel: and blessed is the man that thus feareth always.

The people of God may fear, on account of the circumstances in which they are placed, as probationers for eternal happiness or misery. So that

eternal things depend on every breath ; how slender is the partition, between this world and that which is to come ? they are only separated by the brittle thread of life, which may any moment break asunder ; and then their doom is fixed for ever.

“ Lo ! on a narrow neck of land,
 ’Twixt two unbounded seas I stand,
 Secure, insensible :
 A point of time, a moment’s space,
 Removes me to that heavenly place,
 Or shuts me up in hell.”

A proper view of this situation, fills the mind with awe and dread.

The people of God may fear, on account of the great importance of the work in which they are engaged. They are required, so to lay a foundation for the time to come, that when they fall on earth, they may be received into everlasting mansions ; so to run the race set before them, that they may obtain the prize ; so to withstand in the evil day, that having done all, they may stand ; so to fight the good fight of faith, that they may lay hold on eternal life. They are required to come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty ; and so faithfully to serve their Lord and master, that when he shall appear, they may have confidence, and not be ashamed, before him at his coming. And there is to be taken into the account, their own weakness, and frequent failings, the opposition with which they have to contend, and all the dangers with which they are surrounded. Hence those who work out their salvation, have reason to do it with fear and trembling.

Those engaged in the service of God, may fear they will finally fall, and be eternally lost. After the apostle has stated, that many of the Jews fell in the wilderness, because they provoked God to swear in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest, he adds, Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us

of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. The warning here given, by this awful example, shows that such a direful calamity may take place. That this was the apostle's doctrine is evident, for he says, Thou standest by faith: be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them that fell, severity; but toward thee goodness; if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou shalt be cut off. In all ages, many have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience; and such draw back to perdition. This being the case, it is needful to fear, in order to prevent falling away.

The fear spoken of in the words before us, may likewise arise from a view of the awful consequences of falling away. If, after men have escaped the pollutions which are in the world, through the knowledge of Christ, they are again entangled therein, their last state is worse than the first. They sin against more light and knowledge; they are guilty of deeper ingratitude; they bring so much scandal on religion, that they are said to crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh. Our Saviour said, Thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement, than for thee. He spake this, because they saw his mighty works and repented not. But these words are applicable in a higher degree, to such as have forsaken Christ; they will be involved in still greater condemnation: they will be judged worthy of much sorer punishment. Hence such a fate is greatly to be feared, above all that language can express. And in order that it may be avoided, the apostle exhorts men not only to work

at their salvation, but to work it *out*. It is not enough to commence this work ; it is not sufficient to make considerable progress therein ; there must be a patient continuance in well doing ; a perseverance to the end of life. It is he that endures to the end that shall be saved.

Men are further reminded, that what they are exhorted to work out, is their own salvation : the personal concern of every individual ; for every one must give an account of himself to God : every soul must bear its own burden. If thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself : but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. Therefore look to yourselves, that ye lose not what has been wrought, that you may receive a full reward.

The reason which the apostle assigns for his exhortation, is in these words, For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. By his word and Spirit, he opens the eyes of the understanding, and presents such motives to the mind, as incline the will to that which is good. He likewise gives a power to do his commandments ; so that whenever men choose the better part, and do the will of their Father who is in heaven, it is by the grace of God that is in them ; by a divine energy which God has given them, out of his unmerited kindness ; or in other words, according to his good pleasure. But as the work is of God, some conclude, that human endeavours are unnecessary : that they can answer no good purpose : that the work of salvation can neither be promoted, nor hindered, by any thing that man can do, or leave undone. This would be sound argument, if the grace of God was irresistible, both in its operations, and in its results ; if whenever it was given, it infallibly produced conversion, and subsequent obedience : then there could be no propriety in exhorting men to work out their own salvation. But the grace of God, operates in a way

that is consistent with the exercise of man's own rational powers. Man is constituted an accountable being, by the Judge of all the earth, who will do right; consequently man is a free agent, and his moral liberty is never destroyed, by any supernatural influence, whether good or bad. In every temptation there is a way for his escape: and all the grace bestowed upon him, may be received in vain. The Holy Spirit may be grieved and quenched in the hearts of men; and all the favour of heaven may be frustrated, by unbelief and disobedience. Hence there is cause to fear and tremble; but if there be any failure, it is on the part of man; and when he fails, it is because he does not exercise the grace given unto him. We may therefore see, with what force and propriety, the apostle exhorts those who are become subjects of divine grace, to work out their own salvation; because they could not do this without the grace of God: and no grace will do this work, without man's concurrence.

When the apostle says, Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you; he shows that if any fail to obtain eternal life, it will be their own fault. The influence of the Spirit given unto them, shows that God is willing to pass by their transgressions, to receive them into his favour, and lead them in the paths of righteousness, which terminate in everlasting felicity. So that if any at last be found without a meetness for heaven, they will be left without excuse, and will be speechless at the bar of God.

When the apostle, speaking to believers, says, Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you; he gives them the greatest encouragement, he opens before them the brightest prospects. If in this great work they had only to depend on themselves, they would sink into utter despair; but they are to know that God is their

helper, whose grace is all-sufficient. To declare, It is God that worketh in you, is as much as to say, Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ. My God will supply all your need, according to his riches in glory. His strength will be made perfect in weakness. So that you will be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; and be able to proceed in your way to the kingdom, against all the opposition of earth and hell. When your enemies come in as a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against them. He will give you a shield, that will turn aside the fiery darts of the devil. When you pass through deep waters, the waves shall not overflow you. Fear not worm, Jacob; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; and with the right hand of my righteousness will I uphold thee. Hence you may boldly say, Let us go up and possess the land, for we are well able: because it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Therefore be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.—By the grace you have received, the Lord has done great things for you; and where much is given, much is required. I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

In working out your salvation, be careful to avoid all fatal errors. Some consider salvation only as a work done for them: it does indeed include a work done for them, even the great work of justification by faith; but it likewise includes a work wrought in them; that of a new heart and a right spirit, without which none can be saved; for in Christ Jesus no-

thing avails, but a new creature.—Some hold that men's natural powers are sufficient to work out their own salvation; and others maintain, that they have no part to act in this work: both are far and dangerously wide of the mark. The truth is, God must give the power, and men must exercise that power, so as to become workers together with God. This is the doctrine established in the words before us, Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.

As all needful assistance is given, the work of salvation is what all may perform; for a man is accepted of God, according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not. Multitudes have worked out their own salvation, who were men of like passions with yourselves, and the same hindrances stood in their way; yet they fought a good fight, they finished their course, and kept the faith, and are now reaping their reward. You have the same helps and supports, and may confidently expect the same successful termination.

Be resolved to make the work of salvation the chief concern of your lives; for what would it profit a man, if he should gain all the world, and lose his own soul?

The work of salvation cannot be entered upon at too early a period. Begin in the morning of life, that you may be more extensively useful in the present world, and obtain a brighter crown in the world to come.—The work of salvation will hinder no other lawful employment; for you may be diligent in business, when you are fervent in spirit serving the Lord. The work of salvation is the most profitable employment, for it has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. It makes all things work together for good. The work of salvation is the most honourable employment; for the righteous are the excellent of the earth; they are

the wise who shall inherit glory, when shame shall be the promotion of fools. When the heart is engaged in the work of salvation, it is the most pleasant employment; for the commands of God are not grievous but joyous, and in keeping of them there is great reward. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble: but the path of the just is as the shining light, which groweth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant; Make you perfect in every good work to do his will; working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever: Amen.

SERMON VI.

“EXCEPT a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
—JOHN iii. 3.

THERE was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

By the kingdom of God, is sometimes to be understood, the kingdom of grace in the present world; at other times it denotes the kingdom of glory in the world to come. In the words before us, it may be

understood of the former, yet so as to include the latter ; for whatever disqualifies a man for the kingdom of grace, will exclude him from the kingdom of glory.—To see this kingdom, is not to be understood of taking a view of it merely ; it denotes enjoyment and possession ; in which sense, St. Peter speaks of men seeing good days. To be born again, does not signify a second birth merely, but one of a superior quality, derived from a higher source ; the word used by the evangelist denotes, to be born from above ; which is what he terms, being born of God.

The question is, In what does this new, or heavenly birth consist ? A numerous class of divines, in various communities, contend that baptism is the new birth, the only regeneration requisite for the kingdom of heaven. But on a point of such vital importance, their word is not to be taken, unsupported by any rational argument, or any probability. It might be expected, that a teacher come from God, would teach what was likely to do good, and not evil ; but the Jews at that time placed their dependence on various baptisms, and other outward rites ; so as to neglect inward purity : hence if our Saviour had told this ruler of the Jews, that baptism was a qualification for heaven, he would have strengthened his Jewish errors and prejudices, instead of removing them. Nicodemus says, How can a man be born again when he is old ? This shows he did not understand the new birth to be baptism, because that is an ordinance which the old can receive, as well as the young. And for what reason was he kept so much in the dark ? Our Saviour replied, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Some conclude that water here denotes baptism : if that should be granted, it is evident it would be of no avail, without the work of the Spirit : but there is no proof that there is in these words, any allusion to baptism.

When John says, He will baptize you with fire, and the Holy Ghost; he speaks exclusively of the work of the Spirit. Fire is only to denote the manner of the Spirit's operations: in like manner, water and the Spirit, denote a spiritual operation, cleansing the heart from impurity; as where it is said, Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. How could Christian baptism be mentioned to Nicodemus, when that ordinance was not at that time instituted? Besides, Christ speaks of the new birth, as being exclusively a spiritual change: he says, That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again: the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Our Saviour proceeds, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? This implies that he was culpable for his want of knowledge; and considering his station in the Jewish church, he was blameable for not knowing the necessity of regeneration; but not so with respect to baptism; for he was well acquainted with Jewish baptism, and could not be expected to have any knowledge of Christian baptism, before that ordinance was instituted.

These things show that baptism is not intended by the new birth. If baptism and the new birth were the same thing, what is affirmed of the one, might be affirmed of the other: but this cannot be done with any truth. — He that is born of God, overcometh the world; but this certainly is not true of many who are baptized. Without the new birth none can be saved; but though the penitent on the cross was not baptized, our Saviour said unto him, To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. To make the salvation of any man, depend on what another might do for him,

or leave undone, would be the greatest injustice; and in direct opposition to the declarations of scripture, that every man must give an account of himself to God; and every soul bear its own burden; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. The new birth is a qualification for heaven, but many who are baptized are in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity. St. Paul was sent to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might obtain forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified. Yet he says, He was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel; and adds, I thank God, I baptized none but Crispus, and Gaius, lest they should say I baptized in my own name. But if he had been the instrument of turning no others from sin to holiness, would he have thought that a proper ground of thanksgiving? Christ was baptized, but was never regenerated: he regenerated his disciples, but he baptized none of them. Therefore baptism and the new birth are quite different things. The notion that they are only different appellations for the same thing, is in direct opposition to the whole tenor of divine truth; and is one of the greatest and most dangerous delusions, that ever possessed and degraded the human intellect; or that was ever suggested by the prince of darkness.

Reformation of life, however requisite and commendable, does not constitute the new birth. Nicodemus did not need to be informed, that sinners are required to put away the evil of their doings, from before the eyes of the Lord; that they are both to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well; this he understood. There would have been no mystery in this, to cause him to say, How can these things be? It is true, that those who are regenerated will walk in newness of life; and let their conversation be as becometh the gospel; for how shall those who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? But it is equally true, that there

may be a moral life, without a new heart. The Pharisee who went into the temple to pray, was unimpeachable in his moral conduct; and performed religious duties and devotional exercises. But except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye can in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. The scriptures mark the difference, between doing what God has commanded, and doing it with a perfect heart; and declare that the Almighty does not judge by outward appearance, but looks at the heart; which he requires to be devoted to his service; and it is only so far as the heart is engaged, that any service can obtain his acceptance.

The new birth, is not to be understood, of embracing any system of doctrines; however conformable to the scriptures these doctrines may be; for the most evangelical creed, may be received and maintained, without any proper influence on the heart and life. The greatest gifts, in the discharge of religious duties, are no certain marks of saving grace: for many who have prophesied in the name of Christ, and in his name done many mighty works, will hear him say at the great day of accounts, Depart from me, I know you not. The most zealous devotions, do not constitute the new birth; nor are they always an indication of it; for they do not always proceed from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned: for many draw nigh to God with their lips, and honour him with their mouths, when their hearts are far from him. Nothing external can be a constituent of the new birth; for the kingdom of God, is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, avail any thing, but a new creature.

The new birth is a spiritual change, and consequently an internal one: those who experience it are not conformed to the world, but transformed by the

renewing of their minds. In the new birth, there is a diffusion of divine light into the understanding; by which men see their guilt and depravity, their utter weakness and extreme danger; and are thereby humbled as in dust and ashes; and feel a broken spirit and a contrite heart; which leads them to confess their sins, and cry for mercy. By the light given from above, they see by what means they are to be restored to the favour and to the image of the Divine Being; they come to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, whom to know is life eternal. To such it is said, Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.

The new birth, produces a change in the will: and this is of the last importance; because the will is the faculty of choice; and the cause of whatever is morally good or evil in the conduct of mankind. Whatever a man does against his will, entitles him to neither praise nor blame, reward nor punishment. The will of the carnally-minded, is prone to evil, and and averse to that which is good; it is in a state of hostility to the moral government of God; it is repugnant to the precepts of his law; and it murmurs at the dispensations of his providence. Those who are under its influence, declare in effect, that they will not have the Almighty to reign over them. But this faculty is so changed by regeneration, as to abhor that which is evil, and cleave unto that which is good. Whatever is known to be the will of God, determines its choice; to him it is universally obedient and submissive. Those who have this renewed will in them, are ready to engage in any service, that heaven requires at their hands; their language is, Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do? Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. Under afflictions and bereavements, they will say, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

The new birth produces a change in the conscience, which may be called the faculty of moral sentiment; the judgement which a man passes on his own conduct. Previous to regeneration, men possess an evil conscience; it is evil especially in two respects; on the cases which come before it, it passeth erroneous decisions; it does not judge righteous judgement, but often calls good evil, and evil good; so that many have committed the greatest crimes, with the full approbation of their own consciences. Our Saviour says, The time will come, when those who kill you, will think they do God service. When men sin, as is often done, against their own conscience, it is indeed an aggravated offence: but it discovers a greater depth of depravity, when they sin with an approving conscience, as many continue to do. These may do more harm in their day and generation, and there is less hope of their being reclaimed. So that under some circumstances, when a man is known to be guilty of transgression, kindness for him may hope, that he did it against his own conscience. An unrenewed conscience is likewise hard and unfeeling; it is said to be seared as with a hot iron. This produces apathy and indifference; so that when men know they do wrong, they feel no proper remorse for it. But the conscience is purified from those evils, by regeneration; it is sprinkled from dead works to serve the living and the true God. Then in all its decisions, it comes to the law and to the testimony; and never acquits, where the word of God condemns; and never condemns, where the word of God acquits. It no longer neglects its duty; having received authority from God, it exerciseth it faithfully; it is watchful against all temptations; and so tender, as to abstain from the appearance of evil.

The new birth produces a change in the memory; not by strengthening its powers, but by regulating its exercises. The unregenerate, remember what

they should forget, and forget what they should remember ; they remember profane language, and what tends to excite unholy desires, and to corrupt the mind. But they forget God their Maker ; he is not in all their thoughts : they forget his omniscience, and omnipresence ; his holiness, justice, and truth. They are unmindful of their duty towards him ; and of their obligations, and responsibilities. They forget the interests of their immortal souls ; they have no thoughts of the hour of death, and the day of judgement ; nor of the awful concerns of an eternal world. But when the heart is brought under the influence of saving grace, its former vain imaginations and evil thoughts are dislodged, and the doctrines of divine truth are kept in mind. Those who are born of the Spirit, remember their past sins with self-abasement, and their mercies with lively gratitude. They remember they are probationers for endless happiness or misery ; and desire to be found in peace, without spot, and blameless : they remember the shortness of time, and the uncertainty of life ; and by this means learn so to number their days, as to apply their hearts unto wisdom. In all places they remember that the eye of God is upon them ; for there is nothing that is not manifest in his sight ; they remember his commandments to do them : and to all that the gospel teaches, they give the most earnest heed, lest at any time they should let it slip.

The new birth produces a change in the affections : without this all other changes would be unavailing ; but this makes it complete and effectual. The unregenerate set their affections on things below, and not on things above ; they love the world, and the things of the world, so as to evince that the love of God is not in them. But all who are born of the Spirit, have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto them. They

love God, for they come to see, that he has first loved them; they so love him, as to choose him for the portion of their souls; and so as to do his will cheerfully, and suffer it patiently. They love God, so as to love his cause and interest, his house and ordinances, his ministers and people. They so love God, that what they most desire, is to dwell in his presence. They set their affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Such have experienced the new birth, for he that loveth is born of God.

Without the new birth, no man can see the kingdom of God: he cannot be a proper subject of the kingdom of grace, established in the present world. It is true he may receive its ordinances, profess its doctrines, and be enrolled among its members; but he can neither practise its duties, nor enjoy its privileges. As to its duties, the first and the great command is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: and the next is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Such duties cannot be performed, by those whose hearts are unrenewed by divine grace. The apostle says, Those that are in the flesh cannot please God.—While they remain in a carnal state, they are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Pure streams do not flow from a corrupt fountain. Do men gather grapes of thorns? or figs of thistles? If the tree is not good, the fruit will not be good. Those who are not spiritually-minded, cannot serve God in spirit and in truth; whatever outward service they may perform, they cannot give the heart to God; and while this is the case, their services cannot find acceptance.

Without the new birth, the privileges of the gospel kingdom cannot be enjoyed. In this kingdom, there is the privilege of adoption. To as many as

receive Christ, he gives the power to become the sons of God ; but the evangelist states, that this is confined to such as are born of God. In this kingdom, there is a peace that passeth understanding ; but this belongs only to such as have the Spirit itself, bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God. In this kingdom, there is a joy unspeakable, and full of glory ; but this is a "fruit that will not grow in nature's barren soil." There is the privilege of abounding in hope ; but it is through the power of the Holy Ghost, which dwells in them, and governs them ; and as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ; and such only are begotten again to a lively hope. There is the confidence that all things work together for good ; but this is exclusively limited to such as love God ; and this love is a proof of regeneration. There is fellowship with the Father and with the Son ; but by whom is this enjoyed ? The apostle says, It is he that dwells in love, that dwells in God, and God in him. And those only can have union with Christ, whose hearts have been opened for his reception. Hence, the unregenerate, are not possessed of real gospel privileges ; in this sense they do not see, or enjoy the kingdom of God.

Yet if this was all, there are many who would not lay it to heart ; they have not found the want of these new covenant blessings ; they do not desire them ; when invited to the gospel feast, they make light of it, and go in search of earthly gratifications ; and to a certain extent, they may prove successful : but earthly things perish with the using ; and the hour is fast approaching, when to those who have made the greatest accumulations, it may be said, This night thy soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall all these things be which thou hast provided ? Then, what will be their condition in another world ? They cannot see the kingdom of glory : they have

no qualification for heaven. Whatever unfitted them for the kingdom below, will certainly unfit them for the kingdom above. The blind cannot perceive the beauty of a landscape ; the deaf can take no pleasure in the most melodious music ; and the unregenerate are equally incapacitated for the realms above. The carnally-minded can receive no spiritual enjoyments ; as they have impure thoughts, and unholy desires, they could not be gratified in the regions of perfect purity ; as they choose the ungodly for their companions, they could not cordially unite with those who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his kingdom. As they have not a devotional spirit, how could they be satisfied with the services of an eternal Sabbath ? As they have no love to God, his immediate presence could not constitute their felicity. So that all who can be admitted to glory, must have a previous preparation, so as to be able to give thanks unto the Father, who hath made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Without a meetness for it, there can be no entrance into heaven.

But the matter does not rest in unfitness merely ; it is the determination of the Almighty, that impenitent sinners shall perish, as his word uniformly maintains. All the unregenerate are under the curse of a broken law, which excludes them from the kingdom of heaven, and sentences them to the bitter pains of eternal death. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God ? Without holiness no man can see the Lord. The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God ; who will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, an horrible tempest, this shall be the portion of their cup. Such is the word of the Lord, who will not alter the thing that goeth out of

his mouth ; his counsel will stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations : he is not a man that he should lie ; nor the son of man that he should repent : Hath he said it, and will he not do it ? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good ?

But some, who acknowledge themselves guilty, yet expect to escape, because God is merciful. God is truly merciful to all that repent and unfeignedly believe his gospel ; but were he to pardon sin, when it is neither repented of nor forsaken, it would be in opposition to his holiness, justice, and truth. It would overthrow his moral government in the world, and show that Christ had died in vain : for if mercy could have been so exercised, there had been no need of his cross and passion. Therefore, let no one deceive his own soul. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ; for our God is a consuming fire.—Others, who are convinced that the mercy of God cannot be exercised in opposition to his other perfections, expect to be saved without regeneration, because Christ died for the ungodly. If this notion be acted upon, it will prove a fatal mistake. Christ indeed died for the ungodly, otherwise none could be saved ; but he died to redeem them from all iniquity, to save them from their sins : but repentance must precede the remission of sins. Our Saviour knew what he had to accomplish for a guilty world ; and in the full view of all this, he says, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. St. Paul knew that Christ had died for the ungodly, yet he says, How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? The merits of Christ will augment the guilt of the impenitent ; and they will be counted worthy of sorer punishment, because they have not fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them. From every view which the scriptures teach us to form of the subject, it inevitably follows, that without rege-

neration no man can be saved. All who live and die without a change of heart, will be excluded from the kingdom of God; and those who are thus excluded, will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. This is what our Saviour most solemnly affirms; and his affirmation applies to men of every rank and condition; whether they be high or low, rich or poor; whatever other qualifications a man may possess, without a change of heart, he cannot be saved: hence God commands all men every where to repent. But the new birth is the only indispensable qualification. A man may be poor, illiterate, and despised, without any hinderance to his salvation.

What has now been advanced, has gone to show the nature and necessity of regeneration; but however fully this might be made out, it would be unavailing, if the blessing could not be obtained. But it is no more evident that men need regeneration, than that they may obtain it.

Such is the divine goodness, that God is not willing that any should perish; therefore he cannot have left their salvation unattainable. After all that Christ has done, to seek and to save that which was lost, it is evident that he is able and willing to save all that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. The Holy Spirit is sufficient to make all things new; to take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh. When men remain in an unconverted state, where does the fault lie?

“The hinderance must be all in me:

It cannot in my Saviour be;

Witness that streaming blood.”

The notion that man has no part to act in his own conversion, is opposed both to reason and scripture. It is true, that regeneration is the work of the Holy

Spirit; and in accordance with this, the Almighty makes these gracious promises, I will make you clean; a new heart will I give unto you, and renew a right spirit within you. But the proper conclusion from this is, Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. See then that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; strive to enter in at the strait gate; labour for the meat that endureth to eternal life. Consider that ye have immortal souls, that must either be saved or lost; that God will render to every man according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. Consider that you have but a short time to live, and in the midst of life you are in death; and as death leaves you, judgement will find you; for there is no work, nor device, in the grave, whither thou hasteth. And what would it profit a man, if he should gain all the world and lose his own soul?—Resolve to break off your iniquities, and to turn your feet unto God's testimonies; and to do this without delay. To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Be diligent in all the means of grace; especially be instant in prayer; seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given, knock and the door shall be opened. Pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit. If men who are evil, know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more will your heavenly Father, give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Pray that you may have proper views of yourselves as lost sinners, in order that you may feel deep contrition and self-abasement. To that man will God look, who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at his word. Pray that you may have proper views of the Saviour's merits and grace; of the promises made to returning sinners; of the freeness and fulness of gospel salvation; that you may be able to believe with your hearts unto right-

eousness. And by thus believing, you will be passed from death unto life; and will know what it is to be born from above.

The nature and importance of this blessing, should be understood and remembered; yet many, even in a Christian country, have no knowledge of it whatever. When St. Paul was at Ephesus, he said to certain disciples, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? and they said, We have not so much as heard, whether there be any Holy Ghost. An answer somewhat similar, would have to be returned by many professors of the present day, if they were questioned respecting the new birth. They may indeed have heard of it, but it never engaged their attention, and slipped out of the memory, like water from a leaky vessel: for when any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. Where there has not been the same inattention to the word, the sense of it may have been perverted; it may be understood of baptism; or of some other thing that is different to a change of heart. This is a greater barrier between them and truth, than mere inattention; for if the light which is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness! All such are excluded from the kingdom of God.

To those who desire the new birth, and are beginning to seek after it, these words of the apostle may be applied, Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. There is a promise of rest in heaven, and in order not to come short of it, you must be careful not to fail of a meetness for it, which you cannot have without the new birth; beware lest you come short in this respect. Do not be satisfied with speculative opinions, for however true they may be, they cannot save the soul. Do not be satisfied with

forsaking outward sin, and the practice of moral duties; for however commendable these are in themselves, they do not constitute regeneration. Do not rest satisfied with a strict attendance on the means of grace; for even this is no evidence of a new heart. Do not rest satisfied with convictions, and good desires; it may be well so to begin, but not so to end; these things with many, are like the morning cloud and early dew, that passeth away. Nothing will prepare you for heaven, but the renewal of the heart in righteousness and true holiness.

Those who have experienced the new birth, are to remember, it is only the commencement of the Christian life; and they are to be careful about its progress and completion: therefore grow in grace: giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. Thus you will make your calling and election sure: and if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

• SERMON VII.

“For behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things, ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”—2 Cor. vii. 11.

PAUL was the first who preached the gospel in the city of Corinth: and after some time he was succeeded in his labours by Apollos, who was an eloquent man,

and mighty in the scriptures : and these men did not labour in vain : Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase, Thus a church was founded, and edified by inspired teachers, whose labours were evidently, and abundantly owned of God ; their preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power. And those who received the word, were richly endowed with spiritual gifts. But notwithstanding all these favourable circumstances, their conduct in some respects was highly blameable. One of them, who was probably a teacher, lived in gross immorality, to the great scandal of the Christian profession ; and as the other members tolerated, and countenanced such a practice, they made themselves partakers of his sin. On this account the apostle rebuked them sharply, and threatened them with the judgements of God, unless they purged themselves from such scandals. This produced their repentance, which is described in the words before us. The question is, how far does this description, answer to that repentance, which is required of every individual ? It may not do this in all respects, because the particulars here enumerated, might relate to different persons in that community ; yet in some measure, they may all belong to every true penitent.—It is needful to know the nature of repentance, because it is only those who repent, that can obtain forgiveness. God commandeth all men every where to repent ; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world ; and at his tribunal every impenitent sinner will be condemned. Except ye repent, ye shall all perish.

In describing repentance, the apostle says, *Ye sorrowed after a godly sort.* This is what he calls, in the preceding verse, A godly sorrow, that worketh repentance unto salvation ; and is therefore to be understood of a sorrow for sin ; or a sorrow on account of having sinned. There may indeed be a sorrow for

sin, which does not constitute true repentance. Men may be sorry because sin has injured their health, squandered their substance, blasted their reputation, and darkened their worldly prospects; and likewise heaped up wrath against the day of wrath. It is natural for the pleasure of sin, to turn to grief and vexation; to bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder: the poison whereof drinketh up the spirits. But however excessive this sorrow may be, it is not after a godly sort: it does not arise from any aversion to sin, nor from any desire to please God. It is only such a sorrow as the ungodly may feel, both in this world and that which is to come.

Repentance is a sorrow that proceeds from a discovery of the evil nature of sin; and of the displeasure it gives to the Almighty, who is of purer eyes than to behold it without indignation. Hence penitents have an hatred to sin, and a grief at heart for having grieved God; for having violated his precepts, neglected his ordinances, despised his goodness, abused his mercies, trampled on his authority, and provoked him to wrath. Such a sorrow for sin is after a godly sort, because it is the effect of divine grace: it springs from the light of God's word, and the operations of his Holy Spirit. The Almighty is said to grant men this repentance, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who have been led captive by him at his will. This sorrow is after a godly sort, as it is what God indispensably requires of all sinners; to the end they may obtain forgiveness, through his infinite goodness and mercy. Therefore rend your hearts, and not your garments: for the sacrifices of God, are a broken spirit, and a contrite heart. This sorrow is after a godly sort, as it is a turning of the heart from the power of Satan unto God. The way of transgression is a departure from the Almighty. Sinners are without God in the world; they have gone out

from the presence of the Lord : he is not in all their thoughts : they are far from him by wicked works. But those who repent, turn to the Lord with purpose of heart. In this sense, the prophet says, The remnant of Jacob shall return to God. And when the Prodigal Son came to himself, he said, I will arise, and go to my father : and he arose and came. This sorrow is after a godly sort, because it is that with which God is well pleased. There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth ; and therefore it must be pleasing in the sight of God. Though he is the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, yet to that man he will look, who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at his word ; to such he looks not only with pity and compassion, but likewise with a measure of complacency and delight. For he taketh great pleasure in them that fear him : I will surely have mercy on them, saith the Lord.—This sorrow is after a godly sort, because it tends to practical godliness ; it induces men to turn their feet unto God's testimonies ; to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world.

The apostle proceeds to say, *What carefulness it wrought in you !* The word here used denotes eager solicitude, which produces speed and industry. This the Corinthians manifested in rectifying every disorder of which the apostle had complained. And all true penitents have such carefulness. They are not careful about what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewith they shall be clothed ; but to seek first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness. They are careful to labour, not for the meat that perishes, but for that which endures to eternal life. Their minds are deeply impressed with the thoughts of death, judgement, heaven, and hell ; which makes them careful to know what they must do to be saved ; how they must escape the death

that never dies ; and be able to lay a foundation for the time to come, that when they fail on earth, they may be received into everlasting mansions. As they are solicitous about the end, they are careful to use the means by which it is to be accomplished. They are careful to escape all the pollutions which are in the world, to turn from all their iniquities, and to do that which is lawful and right : to put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light : to let no evil thoughts lodge within them, nor any corrupt communications proceed out of their mouth : to abstain from the appearance of evil. In order that they may avoid sin, they are careful to keep out of the way of temptation. They shun the snares of sin and Satan, and flee from those things which war against the soul. They deny themselves of all ungodliness, and worldly lusts. They do not stand in the way of sinners : they have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them : they come out from the workers of iniquity, and keep themselves separate. They obey this advice of Solomon, If sinners entice thee, consent thou not : go not in the way of evil men ; avoid it, turn from it, and pass away.

A penitent is careful to use every devotional exercise which the gospel prescribes. In particular, he is frequent and fervent at a throne of grace ; because it is written, Seek, and ye shall find ; ask, and it shall be given ; knock, and the door shall be opened. He remembers the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy ; because this is a divine institution which God owns and blesses. He gives devout attendance on the house of the Lord, because it is written, Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Where ever I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; for there God commands his blessing, even life evermore.

The apostle proceeds to say, *Yea, what clearing of yourselves.* What is to be understood by this, is not so easy to perceive. The term used by the apostle denotes apology, which is not a defence, but an excuse or palliation. They could not defend their conduct, for they admitted the justice of the apostle's charge; and expressed a deep sorrow for what they had done. But they might plead that they had not sinned presumptuously, but ignorantly; on which ground they might expect pardon: as it is written in the law, The priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly; and it shall be forgiven him. Paul himself seems to make such an excuse: after stating that he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, he says, But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly. It is however seldom that a penitent can make this excuse; for though he may often have sinned ignorantly, yet in many other cases, he has done what he knew to be wrong; he has transgressed against the convictions of his own mind; he has sinned against light and knowledge: which is a great aggravation of his crimes. And he is so conscious of this, that he is prepared to make a full and frank confession of all his guilt and depravity; and to acknowledge that he has deserved God's wrath and indignation. David says, O Lord, I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me: against thee have I committed this great iniquity: pardon, O Lord, mine iniquity, though it is great. The returning prodigal said, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. It is in this way that forgiveness is to be obtained; for he that hideth his sin shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy. As pardon is thus obtained, it gives all the honour to God, and leaves men to abhor themselves as in dust and ashes, and to say, Unto God belong mercy and

forgiveness, but unto us shame and confusion of face, because we have rebelled against him.

The apostle proceeds, *Yea, what indignation*. By this is to be understood, highly excited displeasure, and vexation; which the Corinthians felt on account of the scandal which had been brought upon their community; and this may be felt by all who repent and turn to God. It is very true there may be much indignation, when there is no true repentance. Those whose spirits have never been humbled by divine grace, and whose hearts have never been broken by contrition, are the soonest kindled into indignation. When their iniquities find them out, and bring upon them rebuke and chastisement, they are highly exasperated. But they are not vexed at themselves, but at other people, by whom they have been detected and reprov'd: or if they be in any degree indignant at themselves, it is not because they have done wickedly, but because they have involved themselves in distress. Such vexation as this arises from a want of repentance. Yet it is evident that a true penitent may feel much indignation; but it is at himself, on account of the baseness of his conduct.

He feels much displeasure, when he recollects his former folly and indiscretion. He sees that in the way of transgression there is little to be gained, and much to be lost. All that can be gained by violating the divine law is of short duration, but the penalty of that law is eternal destruction; for the soul that sinneth it shall die. And what would it profit a man if he could gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Esau, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright; and many, for what is not more substantial, barter away their eternal inheritance. The apostle says, What profit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed? for the end of these things is death. If the profits of iniquity were properly cast up, they would often be found less than

nothing and vanity. But even supposing that sin never failed to bestow great riches, honours, and pleasures; that it even procured crowns and kingdoms, and all the delights of the sons of men; what would all this avail in a dying hour? To one who trusted in his earthly possessions, it was said, This night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall all these things be which thou hast provided? Then the wicked will be driven away in his wickedness, into endless perdition. By this it appears that those who live in transgression, are so infatuated, as to put darkness for light; to call good evil, and evil good; sweet bitter, and bitter sweet. When life and death are set before them, a blessing and a curse; they choose death in the error of their way. And when a man comes to see what a dupe he has been to sin and Satan, and takes a proper view of the folly of his conduct, he feels much indignation.

Moreover, while a man lives in sin, his bad example may be injurious to his associates and connexions. Evil communications corrupt good manners. By this means many may be led into the snare of the devil, from which they are never recovered. And when a man comes to reflect on the injury he has done to immortal souls, he has reason to feel indignation.

A penitent is greatly vexed at himself, when he considers his conduct towards the Almighty, to whom he was under so many obligations to love and adore. God is the father of lights, from whom descends every good and perfect gift. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He giveth unto us and unto all, life and breath, and all things. He is loving and kind unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. In order to accomplish the salvation of the human race, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; and will he not with him freely give us all things? On ac-

count of what he is in himself, and what he has done for mankind, they are laid under the strongest obligations to love him with all their hearts, and serve him with all their strength. But while they live in sin, they are so ungrateful, as to return evil for good: they dishonour his name, they vex his Holy Spirit; they grieve him at his heart. On this account he says, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. And when a penitent considers his base ingratitude to his Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, he is filled with indignation.

The apostle likewise says, *Yea, what fear.* The Corinthians had been guilty of those things which bring the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience; and therefore had cause to be afraid of his judgements: and this in a greater or lesser degree, forms a part of repentance. There may indeed be much fear of punishment, when there is no real sorrow for sin. When Saul heard that he had forfeited his kingdom and his life, he was sore afraid, and fell to the ground: yet he had no true repentance, for he acknowledged that God had departed from him. When Belshazzar saw the hand writing against the wall, he was so much afraid, that his countenance gathered paleness, and his knees smote one against the other: yet he gave no evidence of true repentance. The scripture speaks of some upon whom fear cometh as desolation, after they are excluded from divine mercy; consequently they can have no true repentance. Yet a real penitent may be much afraid, that his sin will not go unpunished. He knows that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men; and that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for our God is a consuming fire. He feels a burden of guilt which he cannot remove; and unless it be removed, it will sink his soul lower than the

grave : so that he is afraid that he will be condemned at the bar of God, and doomed to the bitter pains of eternal death. As Christ is a refuge for sinners, it may be supposed that a penitent has nothing to fear. But he has not yet reached that refuge. In the land of Israel there were cities of refuge, to which when a person had slain a man at unawares, he might flee, and obtain protection ; but in such a case, the next akin was called the avenger of blood ; and he might lawfully pursue the manslayer, and if he came up with him before he reached the city, he might kill him on the spot : so that the person who fled had reason to fear up to the time that he entered the city of refuge. So it is with a penitent. Christ says, Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. And as a penitent has not obtained a sense of acceptance, he may be afraid, that though there is a refuge for sinners, he will be one of those who will seek to enter and will not be able. Those who have this fear, are alive to the realities of an eternal world ; and are awakened to the danger of a sinful state. This fear makes them more watchful and circumspect, and more earnest in their supplications for mercy : and when this is obtained, the earthquake and the whirlwind will be followed by the still small voice of the Spirit, which will witness their reconciliation with God.

The apostle likewise says, *Yea what vehement desire*. That is, urgent desire, which the Corinthians manifested to follow the apostle's instructions, that they might not be under the divine displeasure. And whenever there is true repentance, there will be ardent and eager desires. Those who repent, have a most ardent desire to obtain peace with God ; that peace which passeth understanding, and which the world can neither give nor take away. It is this peace that will remove their burden of guilt, that will heal

their wounded mind, and turn their mourning into rejoicing. For when God lifts up the light of his countenance, it puts gladness into the heart, more than men rejoice, when corn and wine increase. Those who repent, desire to have a clean heart, and a right spirit, renewed within them; to be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that they may perfect holiness in the fear of God. They desire that grace which will enable them to walk as becometh the gospel, that they may shine as lights in the world. They desire to be faithful unto death, that they may be found in peace, without spot, and blameless.

In religious experience, desires for spiritual blessings, precede the enjoyment of them. Eager desire is the hunger of the soul, which prepares it for the gospel feast; and those who have such a desire, are not far from the kingdom of God. Our Saviour says, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Eager desires for spiritual blessings, are requisite to produce suitable exertions for the attainment of them; such exertions as will break through every hinderance, encounter the strongest opposition, and surmount every difficulty; and those will find the pearl of great price, who dig for it as for silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure. The more eagerly men desire the blessings of the gospel, the more happy they will be when they come into the possession of them; and they will be the more careful of their preservation.

There is a measure of grace in the desire for grace; and the remembrance of this may greatly encourage those who have such desires. But let not such rest in good desires; hunger may prepare a man for his food, yet it does not furnish the table. A distinction is to be made between a desire, and the thing desired. It is from God that all good desires proceed, and he who gives the desire, is both able and willing to give the blessing desired. And the promise is, that God will fulfil the desires of them that fear him.

The apostle proceeds to say, *Yea, what zeal*. That is, fervency of spirit, producing a firm resolution, and a vigorous endeavour to accomplish any particular purpose. The zeal of the Corinthians, appeared by their eagerness to effect a reformation. A true penitent, discovers his zeal, by making religion his chief concern, the great business of his life, which has the preference to all earthly considerations. He is determined to sacrifice every worldly interest, to the attainment of eternal life. He will make any sacrifice which the gospel requires, to obtain the testimony that he pleases God. A house full of silver and gold, would not induce him to walk according to the course of this world. He is resolved, according to the grace given unto him, to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. A penitent shows his zeal, by endeavouring to undo all that he has done amiss, as far as it is in his power. It is true there are many injuries which do not admit of reparation; but some injuries may be repaired, and some losses admit of compensation. The injury sustained by a bad example, may in some cases be repaired by setting a good one. When a man's reputation has been injured by slander, it may often be repaired by speaking the truth in love. When a man has been defrauded of his property, his loss may be made up. This is what the law required, and what Zaccheus was resolved upon, when he said, If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold. In this respect a man is accepted of God, according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not. Where a man has not the ability, the Almighty takes the will for the deed. And when a man does all he can to make restitution, it may be said, Behold what zeal. A penitent shows his zeal, by his earnest and persevering prayers to obtain forgiveness with God: unless this can be obtained, he sees he must be eternally lost; and will therefore say, Save, Lord, or I perish.

Be merciful to my unrighteousness; and blot out my transgressions. He lets no hinderances nor discouragements, prevent his supplications; in this respect, he imitates Bartimeus, who when rebuked to hold his peace, cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy upon me. Or he prays like wrestling Jacob, who wept and made supplications; and said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Such prayers have power with God: for the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; and the violent take it by force.

The apostle proceeds to say, *Yea, what revenge.* As this relates to the Corinthians, it may be understood of the sentence of excommunication, which they passed on the delinquent; but as it is applied to repentance in general, it cannot denote any punishment which penitents inflict on other people; for to those who suffer injuries the gospel says, Avenge not yourselves; but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord: render not evil for evil, but overcome evil with good. The followers of Christ are to love their enemies, and to forgive as they hope to be forgiven. But a penitent may be said to take revenge on his sins and corruptions, as by self-denial he mortifies the body, that he may live in the Spirit; so that he is said to crucify the flesh, with all its affections and lusts. On this subject our Saviour says, If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.—The evil propensities of his nature, are the Canaanites left in the land, with whom he is to make no truce, and to whom he is to give no quarter: and by the grace of God, he is determined to extirpate them entirely; so that no one of them may escape the slaughter. To the utmost of his power, he destroys the works of the devil, and

lays waste the kingdom of darkness, by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise and glory of God. In this respect, he comes up to the help of the Lord : to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Thus he takes revenge on sin and Satan, for the injury he has received at their hands.

The apostle concludes by saying, *In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.* By this it is not to be understood, that the Corinthians had always been clear of the crimes imputed unto them, for they were verily guilty by their own confession ; the meaning is, that by their repentance and reformation, they were now become unblameable. WHITBY says, ‘ True repentance from sin, clears us from the guilt of it, not only in the sight of God, but man : so that it is both uncharitable and unchristian, to stigmatize or reproach any person, for the sin we know or believe he hath truly repented of.’ This is substantially correct, but not very explicit ; because repentance does not clear from guilt, without faith in Christ : but this the Corinthians likewise possessed, and hence they stood clear. This will likewise be the case with all true penitents, when by faith they look to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Then all the hand-writing that was against them, is blotted out ; their iniquities are no more to be mentioned unto them. They are received into the Divine favour : and if God be for them, who can be against them ? They stand clear before every righteous tribunal ; they will be clear in the hour of death, and at the day of judgement. This is the heritage of the righteous ; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

Repentance is of the last importance, because without it none can be saved. So long as sinners remain impenitent, they are without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. They are in the broad way that leads to destruction. How

can such escape the damnation of hell? It may be pleaded that God is merciful: but this mercy is not exercised in opposition to the truth of his word, and the justice of his government. He is merciful to those who turn from their iniquities, and seek his face with a broken spirit and a contrite heart; but his mercy does not reach the case of the impenitent. He that made them, will not have mercy upon them; and he that formed them will show them no favour. If God could have saved sinners by his mercy alone, there would have been no need for the death of Christ: but it was requisite that Christ should die, that God might be just, and the justifier of the ungodly. But on this ground, the impenitent may have another plea; they may suppose, that they can be saved in their present state, because Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. But this plea is without foundation; for those who do not repent, have no interest in the Saviour's merits: of such he says, Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly. Without repentance none do, nor can, come to Christ: and those who do not come to him, do despite to his grace. And how shall they escape if they neglect so great salvation? On the other hand, repentance opens the way from the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Those who repent are raised from a death in sin, to a new birth of righteousness. Their case is described by the father of the returning prodigal, when he said, This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.—Therefore blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

As repentance is so indispensable, and so highly beneficial, the question is, How is it to be obtained? It will be seen that the scripture speaks of it sometimes as the gift of God; and at other times, as a duty to be performed by man. It is said, Christ is

exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel. Then has God granted unto the gentiles, repentance unto life. But in other parts of scripture, men are commanded to repent, exhorted to repent, and blamed when they do not repent. By comparing these passages together it may be seen, that God gives grace for repentance; and requires men to exercise that grace. On the part of the Almighty, nothing will be wanting; he sends his Holy Spirit to convince men of sin, to show them their danger, and to afford them all needful assistance. Therefore be careful to exercise the grace given unto you; lay your eternal concerns to heart; remember that every man must give an account of himself to God, in the day when he will judge the world in righteousness. To-day then if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Life is short and uncertain; no man knoweth what a day may bring forth, and there is no repentance in the grave: as the tree falls so it lies. Consider that it is God himself that commands all men everywhere to repent: make haste, and delay not to keep this commandment; in the keeping of it there is great reward, as is evinced by this gracious declaration, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God for he will abundantly pardon. Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out; and the times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord.

SERMON VIII.

“THROUGH this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified.”—ACTS xiii. 38, 39.

As the Jews acknowledged the truth of divine revelation, St. Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch, endeavoured to convince them by the scriptures, that Christ was the true Messiah. For this purpose he cited these words of the Psalmist, Thou wilt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption. This prediction was not fulfilled in David; for like other mortals, he was laid in the grave and mingled with the dust; but it was accomplished in Christ, who rose from the dead on the third day. This argument the Jews could not overthrow; yet they were not willing to be convinced, because Christ had not conferred on their nation such worldly riches and honours, as they had confidently expected, and ardently desired. To remove this objection, the apostle showed, that Christ did not come to confer earthly magnificence, but to bestow blessings which are spiritual and eternal: he came to save his people from their sins. Therefore, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified.

The blessing here announced, is justification, or the pardon of sin. The offer of this blessing to mankind, supposes them to be involved in guilt and condemnation; for they that are whole have no need of a physician, but they who are sick. If men were innocent, they would never be destitute of accept-

ance with God ; for the Judge of all the earth will do right : his judgement is always according to truth. But all flesh has corrupted its way ; and in all ages, the iniquity of man has been great in the earth. There is none righteous, no not one. This the scripture declares, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world be convicted before God : convicted of actual sin and internal depravity. The carnal mind is enmity against God ; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. But this may seem to take away responsibility ; for how can men be justly condemned for violating a law, which they had no power to fulfil ? The reply is, that man brought himself into this state. God made man upright ; then his moral powers were adequate to all the demands of his Creator. But as man was a free agent, and placed in a state of probation, under the divine law, he was liable to transgress ; and in the time of temptation he was guilty of disobedience ; and thus incurred the divine displeasure. Thus sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all, for all have sinned. By falling into the snare of sin and Satan, man lost his union with the fountain of life ; and thus all his faculties were depraved ; and he was left without spiritual strength. But this did not lessen the just demands of his Creator, nor take away man's responsibility. Moreover, if man remain incapable of obedience, it is his own act and deed. Ample provision is made for his deliverance ; the grace given from above is sufficient for him. So that if he continue in a state of transgression, it is his own fault ; and he is left without excuse.

The divine law, to which even fallen man is amenable, requires universal and constant obedience ; and it extends to the thoughts and intents of the heart. But when God looked down from heaven, he saw that every imagination of the thoughts of

men's hearts were only evil, and that continually. Such a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit. So that when the state of man by nature, comes to be compared with God's holy law, it will be manifest, not only that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, but likewise, that their iniquities are more in number than the hairs of their head; and their transgressions are grown up to heaven. They are consequently in a state of condemnation. Cursed is every one, that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. The soul that sinneth it shall die. So long as men continue in sin, the wrath of God abideth on them. They have a fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries. They stand on the brink of perdition; they are in danger of everlasting destruction; where the worm dieth not, and the fire shall not be quenched. Therefore, unless they obtain the remission of sins, they can by no means escape the damnation of hell. Those who consider their latter end, will perceive the infinite importance of the blessing announced in the words before us, Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified.

But in what does this justification consist? After trial, at an earthly tribunal, the declaration of a man's innocence is his justification; he is cleared of all accusation: and his acquittal is not a favour, but an act of justice. But in this manner, no flesh living can be justified before God: for they are previously found guilty by the clearest evidence, and even by their own confession; so that any justification they can obtain, is to them an unmerited favour. At an earthly tribunal, if a man be pardoned, he is not thereby justified; for his reputation may be blasted, and he may have forfeited many of his former immunities. But when a man receives forgiveness with God, he is justified from all things, from

which he could not have been justified by the law of Moses ; and stands entitled to all the privileges of an innocent or just person. In an earthly court, pardon and justification cannot be reconciled together ; for to pardon, is to dispense with the law ; and to justify, is to act according to law. But things which are so opposite in themselves, are made to harmonize in the mystery of redemption, where mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. The justification of a sinner before God, consists in the pardon of sin. So that in scripture, pardon and justification are used to denote the same thing. David describes the blessedness of the man whose iniquities are forgiven ; and the apostle applies this to one that is justified. He likewise says, we are justified through the redemption there is in Christ : in whom, we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. So in the words before us, we read, Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified. So that pardon and justification are different terms, denoting the same gospel privilege. But neither of these terms alone express all that is intended ; something further is to be understood, which the other term will supply. When acceptance with God is termed the pardon of sin, it is to be understood of a pardon that is consistent with the full claims of divine justice ; for there is no unrighteousness with God. When this blessing is termed justification, it is to be understood of a justification obtained through grace and mercy ; for whenever men are justified before God, it is because he is merciful to their unrighteousness. Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

As the only justification which men can obtain, consists in the pardon of sin, all boasting on their part is excluded : and after they are justified, they

are to remember that they deserve God's wrath and indignation ; and are to be ready to say, Unto thee belong mercy and forgiveness, but unto us shame and confusion of face, because we have rebelled against thee : wherefore we abhor ourselves as in dust and ashes. In their highest state of exaltation, their language is to be, Not unto us : not unto us : but to thy name be all the glory.

But though justification stands only in the pardon of sin, yet nevertheless, it is perfect and complete. It reconciles men to God ; and if God be for them, who can be against them ? It not only removes the curse of the law, but answers all its demands. It is the remission of all sins that are past ; including those of omission ; and when a person is pardoned for neglecting his duty, he is in the same state before God, as if he had performed his duty. He is as righteous in the eye of the law, as if he had never violated one of its precepts, nor omitted one of its injunctions. Therefore, every pardoned sinner is fully justified before God.

But however perfect justification may be, it is not to be confounded with sanctification : for in whatever measure these two blessings may be united in Christian experience, they are in themselves totally distinct ; and one of them cannot be a substitute for the other. Justification, in reference to sinners, is an act of God done for them : but sanctification is a work of God wrought in them. The former changes their state and condition, the latter changes their nature and disposition ; making them new creatures. In reference to sin, justification removes its guilt ; but sanctification subdues its power, and washes away its defilement. With respect to the law, justification removes its curse ; but sanctification writes the law in the heart, and fits men for new obedience. With respect to the Almighty, justification removes his wrath ; but sanctification renews men in God's

image ; it makes them partakers of the divine nature. Justification gives a title to heaven ; sanctification gives a meetness for that kingdom. Justification is complete at first ; but sanctification admits of growth and improvement. They are both essential to salvation ; there must be both the pardon of sin, and purity of heart, to make men perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Justification is here stated to be derived from Christ : by him all that believe are justified. He is the whole and sole meritorious cause of a sinner's acceptance with God. There is no other name given under heaven among men, by which any can be saved, but the name of Christ ; neither is there salvation in any other. The Prophet says, We all like sheep had gone astray ; and the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief ; he made his soul an offering for sin. Accordingly, the apostle says, He who knew no sin, was made sin for us ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The word used by the apostle, rendered sin, frequently denotes a sin-offering ; and in this sense the apostle is to be understood ; for Christ could not be made sin in any other way. But he was cut off, to make reconciliation for iniquity. He bore the punishment due to sin, in the room and stead of sinners, that they might obtain forgiveness with God. When he gave his life a ransom for all, he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself : hence God for Christ's sake, forgives men their iniquities. As Christ by the merits of his death, has made provision for the justification of believers, Jeremiah says, This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.

With respect to the righteousness of Christ, some distinguish between his passive and active obedience ; and maintain that the former obtains the

pardon of sin, and the latter procures the divine favour, by being imputed for justification. But the scriptures made no such distinction, neither as to the righteousness of Christ, nor as to a sinner's acceptance with God. Such distinctions are not requisite; they can answer no good purpose. It is true, there might have been a difference between the pardon of a sinner, and his justification, if it had pleased God: but the whole tenor of divine truth makes it manifest, that this is not the case; that every pardoned sinner is in the divine favour, and fully justified. And when men obtain the pardon of sin, through the atonement which Christ made on the cross, there can be no need of the imputation of his active obedience, to procure the divine favour; for the pardon of sin, and the divine favour, are received by the same means, and at the same moment. When a cloud intercepts the light of the sun, whatever removes the cloud, restores the light. The guilt of sin is what causes God to hide his face from sinners; and when that is removed by forgiveness, then he lifts upon them the light of his countenance.

But some ask, for what purpose Christ fulfilled all righteousness, if it were not to be imputed to his people for their justification? The futility of this will appear, when it is considered that Christ, as to his human nature, was born under the law; and had he not obeyed its precepts, he would have been a transgressor; and he could not have been the High Priest of our profession, if he had not been holy, harmless, and undefiled. If he had not been an offering without blemish, he could not have been the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Christ's active obedience, was a perfect fulfilling of the law; and if this was imputed to men, they would need no forgiveness. If perfect obedience was placed to their account, they could not be reckoned as transgressors; and consequently they could receive no

pardon. Moreover, if the active obedience of Christ, could have been imputed to men for their justification, there would have been no need of his sufferings and death. The apostle says, If righteousness came by the law, Christ is dead in vain: and the argument equally holds in this case; if the active obedience of Christ, could have been imputed to sinners, there had been no need of his death on the cross. And if the Almighty imputed the active obedience of Christ to his people, he could require no obedience from themselves.

Christ became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: and on this passive obedience, men are to place their dependence. It behoved him to suffer, that repentance and remission of sins, might be preached in his name, among all nations. As the captain of salvation, he was made perfect through suffering. And in point of acceptance with God, we are to know nothing, but Christ and him crucified: we are not to glory, but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has redeemed us to God, by his own precious blood. Therefore, through this Man is preached the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified.

Justification is obtained by faith: those who believe, are justified; and those only. The promise of mercy and peace to mankind, is published by the gospel; but when it is not believed, the gracious design of heaven is frustrated. Unto the Jews was the gospel preached, but the word did not profit, as it was not mixed with faith by them that heard it. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Yet it is not every kind of faith, that obtains forgiveness: it is therefore of importance to consider, what constitutes justifying faith.

The nature of faith, in some measure, depends on the truth that is believed: and in reference to the justification of a sinner, the truth to be believed, is

the testimony that God has given of his Son. This testimony is, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world; that with his own blood he entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Wherefore he is able to save them unto the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. This is the word of the Lord; and he that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true.

But to form a proper notion of justifying faith, besides the truth to be believed, the manner of believing the truth must be taken into the account. However excellent the doctrine believed may be, if there is no more than a mere assent of the mind, which has no proper influence on the heart and life, such a faith has no saving effect. Among those who witnessed our Saviour's miracles, St. John informs us, many of the chief rulers believed on him; but because of the Pharisees, they durst not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. These rulers were convinced of the truth; but they did not walk in the truth: and such a faith could not obtain their acceptance with God. St. James says, Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? and by a dead faith, no man can be saved; neither here nor hereafter. Many living in wilful transgression, believe every article of the Christian creed; but this only serves to aggravate their fault; for he that knows his master's will and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.

Any description of justifying faith, would be essentially defective, if it did not include confidence in Christ. The gospel shows, that in the work of the Redeemer, there is safe ground for the confidence of sinners, which cannot be found anywhere else.

Christ is the foundation which God has laid in Zion : and other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. So that no man can be justified, without confidence in Christ, and in him alone. But even on this point, there may be a fatal mistake. Some conclude, that if they have confidence in Christ, they are certainly in a state of salvation. Yet this may not be the case ; for there may be confidence in Christ, without saving faith. Our Saviour declares, Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity. These men had strong confidence in Christ ; but as this did not induce them to flee from sin, it never procured their acceptance with God.

Many who work iniquity, believe that their salvation was finished on the cross ; that they are so delivered from the moral law, as to be under no obligation to obey its precepts ; that they are so complete and secure in Christ, that no sin can endanger their eternal salvation. But notwithstanding their great confidence, they are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. They are crying peace to themselves, when sudden destruction is coming upon them. Without holiness no man can see the Lord. Vengeance will be taken on all them that obey not the gospel.

From all this it is manifest, that justifying faith includes something besides assent and confidence ; and what that is, the scriptures do not leave in the dark. St. Paul affirms, that nothing availeth, but faith that worketh by love. If I had all faith and had not charity, I am nothing. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. In scripture, the term heart, does not only denote the understanding, but

likewise the will and the affections; and these, as well as the mind, are to be engaged in the work of faith. So that those who believe with their hearts unto righteousness, have a cordial approbation of the gospel plan of salvation. They are willing to be saved from all sin. They heartily approve of Christ as a prophet, a priest, and a king; they submit to his will in all things: they are willing that he should reign over them: their desire is, to do his will cheerfully, and suffer it patiently. So that saving faith is not a mere act of the mind, it engages the will and the affections.

But those exercises of the heart, which enter into justifying faith, cannot be performed by such as are strangers to regenerating grace. There must be a work of the Holy Spirit, preparatory to the exercise of saving faith. That promise is in some measure fulfilled, "I will take away the heart of stone; and give you a heart of flesh;" for so long as the heart remains hard and impenitent, there is an aversion to the yoke of Christ: while men have such a heart in them, they will not come to Christ that they may have life; their language is, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Before men can receive Christ, or in other words, exercise saving faith, they must have a broken spirit and a contrite heart; a godly sorrow for sin, that worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of. And those that experience true contrition, will confess and forsake their iniquities; and will seek for mercy by earnest prayer and supplication. And whenever a man is brought into this state, the message of the gospel is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

But, unless men are brought to have a humble and a contrite heart; to hate sin, and be willing to obey the gospel, no faith can save them. This however is objected to, because God justifieth the

ungodly. That he does this must be granted ; otherwise no sinner could ever be justified. But God does not justify all the ungodly, and there must be a difference between those he filleth with good things, and those he sends empty away ; for he is no respecter of persons. If it be said, that some are not justified, because they do not believe, this is only part of the truth ; for so long as men live in wilful sin, they could not be saved if they did believe. But whatever change may have taken place, in the disposition and practice of those who are seeking mercy, they may still be termed ungodly, previous to their justification ; because they have lived without God in the world, and are still accountable for all their ungodliness ; they are still guilty, and under the condemnation of the divine law ; but this does not imply, that they continue in the love and practice of iniquity, up to the moment they are justified : for in all God's offers of mercy, turning away from sin, is made an indispensable condition of forgiveness. What saith the scriptures ? He that covereth his sin shall not prosper ; but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God for he will abundantly pardon. Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out.

It is observable, that in these, and many other portions of scripture, there is no mention of faith, as a condition of acceptance : but when faith is not expressed, it is always implied ; because in other passages, it is declared to be indispensable. And by the same rule of interpretation, when repentance is not mentioned, it is to be understood, because God commands all men everywhere to repent ; and

declares, that except they repent they shall all perish.

When our Saviour commenced his ministry, he said, Repent and believe the gospel. And the terms of acceptance with God, are still the same. But though men are indispensably required to repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance, yet this is not of itself sufficient. If the head were waters, and the eyes a fountain of tears, and a man were to weep day and night for his iniquities, this would not remove his burden of guilt; it would not be a balm to heal his wounded mind; it would not procure forgiveness with God. It would not do this without faith. It is he that believeth that is justified. Let a penitent sinner exercise faith in Christ, and he will then obtain the blessing. Let him seek the aid of the Holy Spirit, that gives the power to believe; for in this sense faith is the gift of God. But the exercise of that power is the act of man, or it could not be a condition of his acceptance. Let the penitent therefore strive to believe: to believe that gospel salvation is to be obtained, without any merit on the part of man; that it is to be obtained by the chief of sinners; that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost: that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; that by his sacrifice on the cross, he has satisfied the claims of Divine justice, magnified the law and made it honourable; that such as come unto him, he will in nowise cast out; that he is both willing and able to save this very moment; for all things are now ready: behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation. Let him believe with an application of the promises to his own case. And the moment a broken-hearted sinner thus believes, his iniquities are blotted out, and he is passed from death unto life. The Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is born of God. He can then walk in the light of God's countenance; rejoice in his name all the day; and in his righteousness be exalted.

The justification of a sinner before God, is a blessing of greater value than any human language can express. Our Saviour says, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. This may be applied to justification; and were a man to give all the world in exchange for it, he would be an infinite gainer by the bargain. Those persons are impressed with the great value of this blessing, who consider the number and magnitude of their offences, which justification removes from them, as far as the east is from the west: they are all blotted out, to be remembered no more. The great value of this blessing is evinced, by the great evils it delivers men from. It removes all slavish and tormenting fear; the stings of a guilty conscience; the curses of a broken law; the indications of Divine wrath; and the bitter pains of eternal death. The great value of this blessing appears, by the expedient which heaven has employed for its accomplishment. God spared not his own Son; he was delivered up for our offences. The Jewish sacrifices could not take away sin; this could only be done by the blood of Christ; by his cross and passion, his agony and bloody sweat. The great value of this blessing is manifest by the inestimable privileges of those who are justified. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts; and we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God. They are adopted into the family of heaven, and can say, Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God. They have an inward kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost. They have the Divine favour, which is better than life; their fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. They are interested in all the unsearchable riches

of Christ. They have a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away: and are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee? a people saved by the Lord.

It is a serious consideration, that every individual is either justified, or in a state of condemnation; and consequently is either in the way that leadeth unto life, or in the way that leadeth unto destruction. Therefore let a man examine himself, whether he is in the faith; whether he has been turned from darkness unto light: from the power of Satan unto God; so as to receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified? And whether he has the evidence of this at the present moment? and whether he can say with the apostle, The life that I live, is by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The unspeakable blessing of justification, is freely offered to all. It is a fountain opened, not only to the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but to the whole human race; whether they are Jew or gentile, bond or free, rich or poor. Of Christ give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins. This is the doctrine to be preached in all the world, and to every creature. And whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Some have not obtained this blessing: they have never sought for it: all the promises of it, they have treated with neglect or disdain. But let such know, that their iniquities will find them out. If the guilt of sin is not removed by forgiveness, it will sink the soul lower than the grave; to that place of torment, from whence there is no redemption. Because there is wrath beware, lest He take thee away with a stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. To-day then, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your

hearts. In the concerns of your immortal souls, no delay can be made, without the danger of destruction. Seek the Lord while he may be found: call upon him while he is near. Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

All who have been justified, have obtained that blessing, through infinite grace and mercy; which is a perpetual obligation to self-abasement and contrition; for this purpose, let them always remember, that it is of the Lord's mercy that they are not consumed; and because his compassion fails not, that they are still in the land of the living. — Let such be grateful for the inestimable benefit they have so freely received; showing forth the praises of him, who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. In addressing such, we say, be careful to hold fast whereunto you have attained: for it were better that men had not known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to depart from it. The last state of such is worse than the first. Therefore look to yourselves, that ye lose not what has been wrought, that ye may receive a full reward. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to bring you to eternal life.

SERMON IX.

“BLESSED is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance: in thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.”—PSALM lxxxix. 15, 16.

By the joyful sound, may be understood, the declaration in the preceding verse, respecting the divine government, where it is said, Justice and judgement

are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. This is to show that God rules in righteousness; therefore, let the children of Zion be joyful in their king. Under his reign it will be well with the righteous; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. But at a righteous tribunal sinners are condemned; and may expect that the rewards of their hands shall be given them. Yet to open to sinners a door of hope, it is stated, that mercy and truth shall go before his face. These attributes shall be conspicuously displayed in the administration of his government; they shall go before him as his heralds to proclaim his goodness, and as his ministers to dispense his blessings. Yet still it is to be remembered, that mercy and truth may be at variance. If all the threatenings against sin be verified, where can there be an opportunity for the exercise of mercy and grace? This difficulty has been removed: Infinite Wisdom has devised a plan by which mercy and truth have met together; so that God can be just, when he justifies the ungodly. This is manifest by the revelation which God has given in the gospel of his Son, which is glad tidings of great joy to all people. And as the Psalmist frequently speaks of Christ, and of gospel times, he may be understood to do so in the words before us.

At the same time, it is most probable, that he alluded to some joyful sound, well known to the people of Israel; which was a shadow of good things to come; a joyful sound that was to receive its completion under the gospel. The special tokens of the divine presence produced joy and gladness; Balaam, describing Israel as a people saved by the Lord, says, The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. Isaiah says, They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest; and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. The

Psalmist says, The voice of rejoicing is heard in the tabernacles of the righteous; the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.—Moses was commanded to make silver trumpets, which were to be blown to assemble the people at the door of the tabernacle. Also, it is written, In the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God.

These were joyful sounds to Israel, which receive their consummation under the gospel. But what we suppose the Psalmist more particularly alludes to, is, the joyful sound of the jubilee trumpet. The Lord said unto Moses, Thou shalt cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all the land. This would be a joyful sound to many, because it announced their release from all the debts they had contracted. As it is written, Every creditor that lendeth out to his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, it is the Lord's release. This privilege of the jubilee has its consummation in the gospel, which proclaims the forgiveness of sins. Those who violate the precepts of the divine law incur its penalty, which is a debt due to divine justice; and this is a debt which all have contracted, for all have sinned; there is none righteous, no not one. This debt has been contracted by mankind to an awful amount, for their iniquities are more in number than the hairs of their head; and their transgressions are grown up to heaven. Of these debts, an exact account is preserved in the book of God's remembrance; every sinful thought, word, and deed, is observed by the eye of Omniscience, and not one of them is forgotten before God. For all

these debts, the reckoning day is fast approaching ; for every one must give an account of himself to God ; and be judged by that law which declares, The soul that sinneth it shall die. Be not deceived ; God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Sinners cannot discharge any part of the debt they have contracted ; for future obedience would not diminish the guilt of past transgressions. Hence, those who are awakened to a proper sense of their guilt and danger, feel their iniquities a burden too heavy to bear ; they are bowed down greatly, and go mourning all the day. But to such the gospel announces, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them : that Christ gave himself a ransom for all ; and of him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins, and be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Thus they hear joy and gladness, that the bones broken may rejoice.

The trumpet of the jubilee was a joyful sound to many, because then slaves were liberated ; even those who had sold themselves into that state. The law of the case was this, If thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee, he shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee, and then shall he depart from thee ; both he and his children with him ; and shall return to his own family, and unto the possession of his forefathers. Such persons, in anticipation of the happy event, wore garlands on their heads for ten days before the commencement of the jubilee, in token of gladness. This valuable immunity likewise belongs to the gospel ; which proclaims liberty to the captive ; and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; it announces the acceptable year of the Lord. All sinners are slaves, reduced to a state of thralldom and degra-

dation. They are tied and bound with the chain of their iniquities, till the pitifulness of God's tender mercies loose them. St. Paul terms the ungodly, servants of sin ; and says, his servants ye are whom ye obey ; the word he uses signifies slaves. St. Peter calls sinners the servants or slaves of corruption, and says, For of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought into bondage. They are subjugated by the evil propensities of their own hearts, and likewise by the influence of the wicked one ; for Satan is the spirit that works in the hearts of the children of disobedience. This servitude is more cruel and destructive than Egyptian bondage. Into this state, the prophet declares, that men have sold themselves for nought. It is their own act and deed, and they obtain no equivalent for the loss of their freedom ; nothing to compensate for the galling yoke they have to bear. What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed ? for the end of these things is death. But from this vile slavery, all who embrace the gospel are emancipated : God grants them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who had been led captive by him at his will. The law of the spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus, makes them free from the law of sin and death. And being made free from sin, they become the servants of God, having their fruit unto holiness, and their end eternal life. Sin has no dominion over them ; and if sin has no dominion, Satan can have none : he is bruised under their feet. Thus they are brought out of the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

The trumpet of the jubilee was a joyful sound to many persons, because it announced their return to their alienated possessions. The family inheritance had been sold either by themselves or their fathers, but it reverted to them again in the year of jubilee.

Their title to it was then indisputable ; and the estate was without incumbrance : and in this respect the gospel may be called a jubilee, as it brings to those who receive it, all their forfeited possessions. When man came out of the hands of his Creator, he was formed in the divine image ; he had a pure heart and a good conscience ; he was happy in the favour and love of God, and was entitled to immortal felicity. So that by the bounty of his Creator he was rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing. But by transgression he forfeited all these valuable possessions, and became wretched, and miserable, poor, and blind, and naked. But Christ came into the world to save sinners ; to raise them from the ruins of the fall, and reinstate them in man's primeval dignity and felicity. Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. To those who receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God ; he makes them partakers of the divine nature ; and the matter of their rejoicing is the testimony of a good conscience ; they have the testimony that they please God ; and his favour is better than life. They are likewise entitled to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away ; reserved in heaven for those, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.

The gospel is therefore a joyful sound ; it is infinitely more so, when properly understood, than the trumpet of the jubilee. The privileges of the jubilee were only earthly things, which perish with the using. A man might have his debts discharged, and not have his sins forgiven. After he was liberated from his earthly master, he might be sold under sin, and live in bondage to the fear of death : though he might obtain a landed estate, yet he might have no title to heaven. After a man had been put in

possession of all the privileges of the jubilee, he might any moment be deprived of them by the stroke of death. But the gospel has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Its blessings are spiritual, they are adapted to the nature and capacity of an immortal soul; they satisfy and sanctify the mind. They are such as cannot be gotten for gold; they are more precious than rubies; they are such as could be procured only by the precious blood of Christ. They are high as heaven, and durable as eternity; they bid defiance to death and the grave; they grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

The benefits conferred by the jubilee were no acquisition to the nation at large; for all that was gained by some, was lost by others. So that the announcement of the jubilee might cause grief in many families, who had property to give up, and none to receive. But the gospel is unmixed with any cause of grief; for the benefits it bestows on some, are no privation to others: when, for instance, it gives justification or sanctification or any other blessing to one person, it does not take any privilege away from any other individual: and on this account it must be a more joyful sound.

It may be presumed, that the bulk of the Jewish nation were not in debt, were not in slavery, and had not sold their estates; so that many who had nothing to lose, had nothing to gain by the jubilee. But all are in absolute need of the benefits of the gospel. The apostle says, We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.—This teaches that all by nature are dead in trespasses and sins; and that all may obtain redemption; for Christ tasted death for every man; and those who come unto him, he will in nowise cast out: and this makes the gospel the more joyful sound.

The jubilee was rather an act of justice than of

mercy ; for instance, when a person received back his former estate, he only received his own again ; because it had been sold on that condition, and the purchase money reduced accordingly. But the blessings of the gospel are all of mercy and grace : man of himself has no claim to them ; they are the free gifts of God. After all flesh had corrupted its way, God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have eternal life. This infinite goodness and mercy of God, is the only source of all gospel benefits, which are shed forth so abundantly. And this makes the gospel a more joyful sound.

The Jewish people in distress, might have a long time to wait for the jubilee ; as it was fifty years between one jubilee and another ; and hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Many of those who were impoverished and enslaved, would not live to see the return of another jubilee. But whenever sinners have a desire to be saved, the gospel declares, All things are now ready. Behold, now is the accepted time ! behold, now is the day of salvation ! Hence it is the most joyful sound.

Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. But the sound must be heard, before it can be understood ; and understood before it will have a saving effect. St. Paul says, How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God : consequently people must have the word of God, before they can know the joyful sound. The doctrines of man's redemption, can be known only by a revelation from heaven. Many things needful to be known of God, are manifest by the things which are made ; this is true of his eternal power and godhead : for the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament showeth his handywork. But how the human race could be saved from sin, death, and hell, is not to

be found in the volume of Creation : it is what human reason could never discover. The plan of salvation originated in the counsels of heaven, and can only be known as the Almighty has been pleased to communicate it by his word and Spirit.

This communication is made in the scriptures of truth, which holy men of old wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. These contain the testimony which God has given of his Son ; and thereby show unto men the way of salvation. Our Saviour says, Search the scriptures, for they are they which testify of me. John says, These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name. Therefore, those who have the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, are a people highly favoured of the Lord : to such these words may be applied, Blessed are your eyes for they see ; and your ears, for they hear : that is, the words of life, which others have not heard, and which former saints desired in vain.

Multitudes in all ages, have been destitute of the scriptures ; and even at the present day, after all the laudable and stupendous exertions of the Bible Society, there are many extensive regions of the globe, where the people walk in darkness, and know not at what they stumble. Among nations professing Christianity, the bible has often been a scarce book : for many centuries, during what are called the dark ages, it was locked up in an unknown tongue. When translations were made, previous to the art of printing, the price was so high as to keep it from the common people. One year's salary of a clergyman, was the price of a bible. Many whole parishes in England did not contain a single copy : many of the clergy had never seen one ; and if they had seen it, they could not have read it. Some of the bishops could not write their own names. The Bishop of

Winchester, in the year 1299, borrowed a bible of his Cathedral Convent of St. Swithin, and gave a bond for the due return of it, which was drawn up with great solemnity.

After the art of printing was discovered, copies of the scriptures became more plentiful, and various translations were made from time to time; but the abettors of Romish superstition prohibited the reading of the scriptures, by the severest pains and penalties. When they themselves translated and published the scriptures, they made the commands of God of none effect by their own traditions; they declared some of the books of the Apocrypha to be the word of God; they wilfully corrupted the original. To give one instance, instead of repentance, they put, doing penance. They likewise gave what sense they pleased to the words of scripture; and forbade others to exercise their own judgements. After all, they scarcely durst let their own people read them, lest they should see the errors of the Church of Rome. They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. The copies of the scriptures which others had faithfully translated, they often seized, and committed them to the flames: and many persons have been burned at a stake, for reading the scriptures, and maintaining their principles. It will be seen therefore, that in countries professing Christianity, there has often been a famine of the word of God: many could not obtain the scriptures; and those who did procure them, did it at the risk of torture and death. But in this country, at the present time, people have every facility for procuring the scriptures, which they can possess without danger, and read in their own mother tongue the wonderful works of God. May not such be regarded as a people who know the joyful sound?

They have the means of knowing it; and will know it, unless they receive the grace of God in vain.

But to many the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not : for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

In order to have the eyes of the understanding opened to know the scriptures, men must have the operations of the Holy Spirit, they must be taught of the Lord. He who commanded light to shine out of darkness, must shine into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge, of the glory of God in the face of Christ. It is by this light from heaven, that men come to know themselves as sinners, and Christ as a saviour. By this means they know the things which are freely given them of God ; they know the things which belong to their peace.

As it is essential to saving knowledge to have the Spirit of God, it is of importance to know when that Spirit is possessed ; that on this point, people may not deceive either themselves or others. Those who have the Holy Spirit, will exercise their own faculties in the acquisition of divine knowledge. The operations of the Spirit do not supersede study and research ; they induce men to use their own mental powers, to search diligently to know what is the mind of the Spirit. The Spirit itself gives such commands as these, Take heed how you hear : Judge ye what I say : Give attendance to reading : Meditate on these things : Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good. Such exercises are rendered successful by the aid of the Spirit.

The knowledge taught by the Spirit is in accordance with the written word. This word was dictated by the Spirit, and it cannot contradict itself. It never inspires any notion, that does not agree with the apostles and prophets. Many spirits are gone out into the world, to produce error and delusion ; but the scriptures are the standard, by which men are to try the spirits, whether they be of God.

Knowledge by the Holy Spirit, produces Christian experience ; it is not merely speculative or theoretic, it deeply affects the heart. It makes the word quick and powerful ; producing contrition, and a godly sorrow ; an earnest concern for the salvation of the soul ; desires towards God, and the remembrance of his name ; hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; a love to the gospel, to the house, and to the people of God. Those who have this spiritual knowledge, are transformed by the renewing of their minds. Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Knowledge given by the Holy Spirit is practical ; it teaches men to believe and obey the gospel. In the parable of the sower, he that received seed into good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it ; which also beareth fruit.—The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ; and, to depart from evil, is understanding ; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life. Those who in this manner know the gospel's joyful sound, are a blessed people.

They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance ; that is, they shall have the special tokens of the Divine favour. The countenance is the index of the mind, which by assuming different aspects, gives indications of pleasure or displeasure, favour or aversion. When the Jews were cut off for their disobedience to God, they were said to perish at the rebuke of his countenance. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil. But he taketh great pleasure in them that fear him ; and the manifestation of that pleasure is called the light of his countenance : which is a great blessing given to his people. When Israel were brought into great difficulties, the Psalmist says, O God of hosts, look down from heaven ; cause

thy face to shine, and we shall be saved. When the Lord lifts up the light of his countenance, it puts gladness into the heart, more than men rejoice when corn and wine increase. How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! for with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. God is the source of all true felicity: so that his people are satisfied with the river of his pleasures. This not only flows to them abundantly, and continually, but for ever, as a perpetual fountain. Therefore to have the light of God's countenance, is the greatest blessing men can receive in the present world; for his favour is life, and his loving kindness is better than life.

The blessedness of God's people, is further described in these words, In thy name shall they rejoice all the day. By the name of God may be understood those perfections of his nature, which are made known by his wonderful works; hence the Psalmist says, How excellent is thy name in all the earth? His name as proclaimed to the people of Israel, is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Our Saviour says, I have manifested thy name to men. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. In the person and work of Christ, more of God is seen, than the first archangel ever saw before. Herein God is seen, sending his Son, to be the propitiation for our sins. And he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will he not with him freely give us all things?

Believers rejoice in the name of the Lord, because what he is in himself, that he is to his people. His power is their support and protection, his wisdom is their counsellor and director, his sufficiency is their riches, his goodness and truth are the springs of their consolation, his eternity is the date of their happiness. All this is implied in the promise, I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

In his name they rejoice all the day; for he is the

Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. And because they seek their happiness in him alone; they forsake all their broken cisterns, and come to the fountain of living waters; with which they are so fully satisfied, as to exclaim, Thou art the portion of my soul! Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. Thou art all my salvation, and all my desire.

‘ Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant me the visits of thy face,
And I desire no more.’

In his name they rejoice in all the vicissitudes of life: hear the prophet, Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herds in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Hear the believer in the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. My strength and heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Thus they rejoice in his name all the day.

In thy righteousness shall they be exalted. They are exalted in this life, for they are made the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Hereafter they will be exalted from earth to heaven;—from this mortal state, to where mortality is swallowed up of life;—from their trials and conflicts, to a region of peace and security; where the wicked will cease to trouble them, and the weary are at rest;—from the scene of their labours, to a great and eternal reward:—to the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

The exaltation to this eternal weight of glory, will

be in righteousness. It might seem to be a deviation from the rule of equity, to give so great a reward to those, who even in their best days, had been such unprofitable servants; but the merits of Christ make it an act of righteousness. Yet it is the righteousness of God: it is produced by his wisdom, power, and goodness. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord. Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory. Hence appears the truth of this declaration, Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings; and will be blessed with everlasting felicity. Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea happy are the people whose God is the Lord.

Real and enduring happiness, is to be found in the favour and enjoyment of God: hence the Psalmist prays, O satisfy us with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days: but this happiness is not to be found in anything under the sun. Those who mind earthly things, and are most successful in their pursuits, will sooner or later, be taught by experience, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Therefore, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgement and righteousness in the earth. These perfections of God are exercised in the course of his providence, but more especially in the work of redemption; this is evinced by the gospel, which makes it a joyful sound; and worthy of all acceptation. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publishes peace; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word

spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

SERMON X.

“**FEAR** not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—**REV. i. 17, 18.**

WHEN these words were addressed to St. John, he was in the isle of Patmos, to which place he had been banished for the testimony he had borne to the truth of the gospel. In this situation he had to endure many privations and great hardships, but these trials did not lessen his attachment to the cause of Christ; he remembered the Christian Sabbath to keep it holy: he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day: in a devout and heavenly frame of mind, and under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. While in this state he was favoured with extraordinary visions and revelations: he saw one like to the Son of Man, clothed with a long garment, and girt about the breast with a golden girdle: the hair of his head was white as snow; and his eyes where as a flame of fire; his feet like fine brass when melted in a furnace; his voice as the sound of many waters; and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength. At the sight of this majestic grandeur, John was overwhelmed with dread, and fell to the ground: but this celestial messenger put forth his hand to raise him up, and said, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore. The description which our Saviour here

gives of himself, is equally interesting to his followers in all places, and throughout all ages. These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. Hence the words before us deserve our serious consideration; that they may dwell in us richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God and of Christ.

Our Saviour here says, *I am the first and the last*. This form of expression is used in scripture to denote eternal existence. Sometimes this attribute of the Divine Being, is expressed by the word עולם; which signifies what is hidden or concealed; because eternity does not come within the limits of human comprehension: to the mind of man it is unsearchable and past finding out. At other times eternity is expressed by the term αἰών; which denotes unlimited existence: that which always existed, and will never cease to exist: but in other parts of scripture, this mysterious attribute of the Deity is expressed as in the words before us; Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God. I am he, I am the first, I also am the last; mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens. It is never disputed, that these words in the prophecy of Isaiah, express the eternal power and Godhead of the Deity; and in the same sense our Saviour is to be understood, when he says, I am the first and the last. This claim of eternal existence, corresponds with the prophets and apostles. Isaiah speaking of the Child born, and the Son given, styles him the Father of the everlasting age. Micah declares that his goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity. John declares that the Word was in the

beginning with God. And St. Paul says, He was before all things; and by him all things consist. So that the language of inspiration explicitly attributes to Christ, eternal existence. And it is to be remembered that eternity is an incommunicable attribute; power and authority may be given to a person who did not previously possess these attributes; but eternity cannot be conferred on any person in heaven or on earth. If there ever was a period when a person began to exist, he can never be made to have always existed. And as Christ is eternal, he must be self-existent, and all-sufficient; God over all, and blessed for ever. Hence he might say, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending; which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

A consideration of Christ's eternity, discovers his wonderful humility, kindness, and condescension, when he assumed human nature, and became a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs: respecting which the apostle says, Though he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore pray that you may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

The eternal existence of Christ, shows him to be in the likeness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his Father's person; which proves him to be worthy of supreme honour and adoration. On this account, it is the will of God, that all men honour the Son as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father that sent him. In order to teach what homage is due to Christ, when the Father bringeth his first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels

of God worship him. And in this respect, the will of God is to be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

As the eternity of Christ proves him to be God, it shows there was infinite merit in all that he did and suffered in the flesh ; so as to make it available for man's salvation. The union of the divine with the human nature, qualified him to be a mediator between God and man : to die for sinners, and to rise again for their justification : in reference to which, he here says, *I am he that liveth and was dead*. As he came to seek and to save that which was lost, it behoved him to suffer, and to rise again the third day, that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. It was not only requisite that he should lay down his life, but likewise that he should rise again ; and this is stated to have been accomplished, when he says, *I am he that liveth and was dead*.

The resurrection of Christ here taught, is one of the most important articles of the Christian faith ; as the apostle maintains when he says, If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain ; and your faith is also vain : yea, and we are found false witnesses, because we testified that God had raised up Christ.—On the other hand, if Christ rose from the dead, the truth of the gospel is fully confirmed. So that upon this doctrine, the church of Christ must either stand or fall. Hence it is requisite to consider the evidence of our Saviour's resurrection. His death was so public, that it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem ; and has to this day, been acknowledged both by friends and foes. Of his death there could be no doubt ; for while he hung on the cross, a soldier thrust his spear into his side, and there came forth blood and water ; this evinced that the heart had been pierced, and after such a wound no human being could sur-

vive, if no other punishment was inflicted. Therefore, if Christ was afterwards seen alive, he must have been raised from the dead. It might be expected that the Jews who had put him to death, would do all in their power to prevent the belief of his resurrection: accordingly, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember this deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again: command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, You have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.

As far as human power could avail, the dead body was perfectly secure. It was laid in a sepulchre hewn out of solid rock, to which there was no entrance but one, which was closed by a great stone; and the stone was sealed, so that it could not be removed without breaking the seal, which none could do without setting the authority of the magistrates at defiance, and running the risk of the severest punishment. Moreover, there was a band of Roman soldiers appointed to watch the sepulchre; so that none could expect to take away the dead body, unless they could first vanquish the guard: and even this would have been to no purpose, as it would have been known that the body had been taken away, and this would have prevented the belief of his resurrection.

But notwithstanding all these precautions had been taken by the rulers of the Jews, his disciples affirmed, that on the third day they found the stone rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre, the tomb empty, and the guard fled. They also declared that Christ was risen from the dead; of which some

of them had been eye-witnesses, and others had been informed of it by an angel from heaven. This was likely to inflame the minds of the Jews with indignation ; for it was charging them with the blackest crimes of which mortals could be guilty ; it was declaring, that with wicked hands they had crucified the Lord of life and glory. To say he was risen again, was as much as to say, that heaven had declared him to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead, of whom the Jews had been the betrayers and murderers ; so that they might expect his blood would be on their heads, and on their children. The Jews would therefore do all in their power to refute the report of the resurrection, in order to ruin the cause of him whom they had crucified. If after his resurrection had been announced, they could have produced his dead body, it would have proved him a false prophet, and a deceiver of the people. But though they were present at the place, had the civil power in their hands, and the multitude on their side, and likewise the favour and assistance of the Roman governor, yet they could neither produce the dead body, nor give any reasonable account of what had become of it. All they did, and all they could do, was to spread a report, that while the guard slept, his disciples went by night and stole him away. But this report contains no mark of truth ; no vestige of credibility. What could induce his disciples to engage in such a dangerous enterprise ? When their Master was apprehended, they all forsook him, and fled : how then, in so short a time, did they acquire the courage to break through a guard of Roman soldiers ? Whatever courage they might have, they could only have made such an attempt at the hazard of their lives : and what reason could they have to venture their lives in such a transaction ?

They would of course believe, that their Master

was either a true or a false prophet, when he predicted his resurrection. If he was a true prophet, they knew he would rise again; and it was better for him to do this while his body was in the custody of his enemies, as it would be less liable to suspicion. But if they thought him a false prophet, who would not rise again, they must have supposed he had deceived them, and would never give them any reward, either in this world or that which is to come: and in this case, why should they risk their lives in his service? So that whether they believed him to be a true, or a false prophet, they could have no motive to take away the dead body. If without any rational motive, they formed such a rash enterprise, how did it happen to succeed? It is not likely that a guard of Roman soldiers would have been found all asleep at the post of duty, when it was death by the law for any one of them to have been detected in such a state. If they had been asleep, how could the disciples have rolled away the great stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and removed the dead body, without awakening any one of them? If they were asleep, how did they know that the disciples stole him away? If the soldiers, when appointed to watch, had been all asleep, they durst not have acknowledged it, unless they had been prompted to it by a bribe, and a promise of protection. So that it is credibly recorded, that the Jewish rulers gave them money to propagate the report, and said, If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you. So that the report put forth against the resurrection, does not possess one shadow of probability.

Let us see what evidence there is for the resurrection. Considering the divine power, it is not incredible that God should raise the dead: and as a revelation from heaven is of so much importance to mankind, it was worthy the Almighty to give it this

decisive confirmation. The apostles, who published the resurrection, were credible witnesses. And according to their statement, they were intimate with Christ during his life-time, and often conversed with him after his death; and were permitted to handle him, and see that it was not a spirit, but a real body that was before them; and the very identical body which had been wounded on the cross. They likewise affirm that he bestowed upon them miraculous powers. In these respects, they could not labour under any mistake; they could not be deceived themselves: and the testimony they give, bears every mark of sincerity and truth. They did not announce the resurrection in secret recesses; but in the most public places; in the Jewish synagogues, in the streets of populous cities, and before great concourses of people. They did not speak in ambiguous terms, but with great plainness of speech, which could not be misunderstood. They did not publish the resurrection in distant places only, where the people had no opportunity to inquire into the circumstances of the transaction; but at Jerusalem itself, where Christ had been crucified, dead, and buried; and where there was every opportunity to refute the report of his resurrection, if it had been false. The time at which they made the announcement, was equally favourable to inquiry, and a proof of their sincerity; it was not after a lapse of many years, when the circumstances connected with the event might have been forgotten; but in a few days after our Saviour's crucifixion, whilst every circumstance was fresh in the people's memories, they boldly declared, that God had raised him from the dead. They did not speak in this manner before people who could form no proper judgement of the evidence produced, but before Jewish priests, scribes, rabbins, and men learned in the law; who could have detected any flaw in the evidence, if there had been any in the case.

The apostles did not preach that Christ was raised from the dead, before people who had no interest in refuting their statement, or who had neither power nor inclination to oppose it: they preached this doctrine to the Jews, who could not entertain it without being convicted of putting their own Messiah to death; and when they might be said to have the civil power in their hands, and to be breathing out threatenings and slaughter against all who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. Under such circumstances, they could not preach this doctrine, but at the constant hazard of their lives. Their conduct therefore can only be accounted for, on the principle that they knew it to be true; and were supported with the prospect of a future reward. They had nothing to expect in this life, but bonds and imprisonment, torture and death: but in the face of all these dangers, they constantly maintained, that Christ arose from the dead. Of all who professed to witness the resurrection, not one ever denied the fact; and they were all ready to seal their testimony with their blood.

It is utterly incredible they would have done this, if they had known it to be false; and if it had been false, they must have known it. Therefore the evidence of the resurrection is full and complete; and this establishes the truth of the whole Christian religion. Of the divine mission of Christ, God has given assurance unto all, in that he has raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Christ not only confirmed the doctrines he had taught, but prepared him to appear in the court of heaven, as the advocate of his people. Hence the apostle says, It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

To this our Saviour refers, when he further says,

Behold, I am alive for evermore. His rising from the dead put an end to his state of humiliation: death had no more dominion over him. The apostle says, He once suffered for sin: that is, once only. The ransom he paid by his death on the cross was so complete, that there is no need for it to be repeated. When he left the world, he had finished the work that was given him to do; and was then to be glorified, with that glory which he had with the Father before the world was. And the glory on which he then entered is perpetual and eternal. Human glory is like the flower of the field, that is soon cut down and withered: but the glory of our exalted Redeemer is without variableness or shadow of turning; and will shine with everlasting splendour. In this sense he liveth and abideth for ever.

Christ is alive for evermore, with respect to the merits of his death; by which he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. As a proof of the imperfection of the Jewish sacrifices, the apostle says, that they had to be frequently offered: but Christ has by one sacrifice for ever perfected them who are sanctified. The sacrifice he offered on the cross, is of such transcendent excellence, that it retains its virtue throughout all generations: and on this ground he intercedes for his people. Hence the apostle says, He has an unchangeable priesthood: wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Christ is alive for evermore, as the head of the church. His people derive all their spiritual life and vigour from him; they receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace. Those who are without Christ are dead in trespasses and sins: hence men are to come to him that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. Those who have been quickened by his grace and spirit, are to hold fast

whereunto they have attained. Our Saviour says to his followers, Abide in me: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.—This union with Christ is to be progressive; for the apostle says, Growing up into Christ, your living head in all things. As to his own experience he says, Now I live, but not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live is by faith in the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Christ lives to defend and enlarge his spiritual kingdom. When the prophet Daniel is speaking of gospel times, he says, In those days shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that cannot be moved. But it can only be defended by power from above, for it is mightily assailed. Earth and hell make war with the Lamb: but the Lamb shall overcome them; for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. The corruptions of human nature are hostile to his kingdom; but these his grace will subdue in the hearts of his people, so that no sin shall have dominion over them. The apostle speaks of this grace bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.—Superstition and false doctrine are implacable enemies to his kingdom: but this man of sin he will destroy by the breath of his mouth, and consume by the brightness of his coming. His truth is mighty, and will prevail; and will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.—All ungodliness is rebellion against his kingdom: but he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. The apostle says, God having raised up his Son Jesus, has sent him to bless you, by turning every one of you from your iniquities. Christ will put an

end to the reign of sin and Satan, according to his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself. He is at the head of all principality and power; and he must reign till all his enemies are subdued: till he has the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession: till a voice in heaven will be heard saying, The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of God and of Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Christ lives for ever, as the source of felicity to glorified saints. Because he lives, they shall live likewise. Where Christ is, there shall his servants be also, that they may behold his glory; and by this means they will have fulness of joys, and pleasures for evermore.—In these respects, behold Christ is alive for evermore.

To this is added the term *Amen*. This may be a confirmation of the preceding words, as when it is said, verily, or truly. Some understand the word in this place, as the response of St. John, denoting his hearty concurrence with what is advanced; as much as to say, So be it, Lord: so mayest thou ever live and reign.

Then follows these words, *And have the keys of hell and of death*. The term here rendered hell, is not confined to the infernal regions; it denotes the invisible world, including all its inhabitants, whether good or bad, happy or miserable.—Death is here personified; and is the last enemy that is to be destroyed. Keys are emblems of rule and authority; so that the words before us denote, that Christ has dominion over the invisible world; that he reigns supreme over both the living and the dead; over angels and men. He controls the invisible powers, he determines when any one shall enter the mansions of the dead, and what shall be his portion in that place. No one can enter that region, nor keep from

it, but by his permission : for he openeth, and no man shutteth ; he shutteth, and no man openeth. Death now takes its orders from him ; and at his command it must give up its prey. For the hour is coming, when those that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth ; those that have done good, to the resurrection of life ; and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. He will appoint every one to his final destiny in the world of spirits. The Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgement unto the Son. He will send the wicked away into everlasting punishment ; and the righteous into life eternal. So that he has the keys of the invisible world.

The description which Christ here gives of himself, is to enforce this exhortation, Fear not. At that time Christians had much cause for fear ; they were hated of the world, and sent forth as sheep among wolves. In this respect they had reason to fear that all sorts of pains and penalties would be inflicted upon them ; and that the Christian community would be utterly destroyed. And if they had given way to such fear and despondency, they would have been utterly unqualified for propagating the gospel. It was therefore requisite that their minds should be supported by a knowledge of their Redeemer, who had all power in heaven and in earth ; and could so establish his church, that the gates of hell could not be able to prevail against it. In him they were to trust, and not be afraid.

The exhortation, Fear not, is likewise seasonable at the present day ; for the followers of Christ, have still their dangers and hardships, trials and conflicts, which might cause them to be much afraid ; and if they were depressed by timidity, they would be unfit for either the active or passive duties of their high vocation. Hence it is requisite for them to have a strong confidence in Christ, which is inspired by a

proper view of his infinite perfections. When they consider what he is in himself, and what he has done for them, they will see that their help is laid on one that is mighty; that stronger is he that is for them, than all that can be against them. So that it is reasonable they should banish their fears, and be strong in faith, bringing glory to God.

The Christian life is a warfare. The apostle says, We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers; with the rulers of the darkness of this world; with spiritual wickedness in high places. In this contest, the Christian must either conquer or perish; and before these foes, many mighty have fallen. They are numerous, powerful, and malicious; yet of the issue of the contest, the followers of Christ have no reason to be afraid. Christ, as the Captain of their salvation, will furnish them with the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left; he will endow them with power from on high; so that they will be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. So long as they cleave unto the Lord, no weapon formed against them shall prosper; nay in all things they are more than conquerors through him that has loved them.

The followers of Christ are not to be afraid of ungodly and unreasonable men. By these they may indeed be hated and persecuted; and have many things to suffer for righteousness' sake. But the God whom they serve, is able to deliver them; and will give them grace according to their day: when their enemies come in as a flood, his Spirit shall lift up a standard against them. Hence David says, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me. Our Saviour says, Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets, which

were before you. By this it appears, that their enemies are permitted to inflict temporal injuries upon them; but the encouragement is, that their enemies cannot deprive them of spiritual blessings in this life, nor of a recompense in the world to come: and their future recompense will be the greater, on account of their present conflicts. Hence they are to endure, as seeing him who is invisible. They are not to cast away their confidence, which has great recompense of reward. They are to gird up the loins of their minds, to be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought unto them, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In their passage through the world, the followers of Christ may be involved in much distress; they may be greatly afflicted in mind, body, and estate. They may be in deep waters where the billows go over them. Yet in these circumstances they are not to be afraid. For though many are the afflictions of the righteous, out of them all the Lord delivereth them. Under their afflictions they will obtain adequate support; for the Lord hath said, I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee: when thou passeth through the fire I will be with thee, and the flame shall not kindle upon thee. All their afflictions are sanctified, to make those who are exercised thereby, more meet for heaven. For all things work together for good, to them that love God. When believers are in heaviness through manifold temptations, it is that the trial of their faith, which is more precious than gold, may be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Christ. Their light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for them, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Hence they are to confide in the Lord, and hold fast the assurance of hope unto the end. Surely there is an end, and their expectation shall not be cut off.

The followers of Christ are exhorted not to fear with respect to their final acceptance. It is true they may be assailed with doubts and fears, when their faith is not strong, and their evidence is not clear. They may feel so much weakness, as to doubt they will not be able to hold out to the end. They may be dismayed by a view of their own unworthiness; they may see that in so many things they offend; and that there is so much imperfection in their best duties, as to be apprehensive, that when weighed in the balances, they will be found wanting. The antidote to these fears, is confidence in Christ; who died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God; and is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. He says, He that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out. He will not cast them off for all their failings and infirmities. He is able and willing to succour them that are tempted. He has made an atonement for their sins, and is their advocate with the Father, And the apostle says, Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and grace to help in time of need. As Christ is all-sufficient, be not faithless but believing: or in other words, fear not; but look unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and at last to present you faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

As the followers of Christ are not to fear the attainment of final salvation, it follows of course that they are not to fear death. If men have no hope of heaven, they live in bondage to the fear of death. To the ungodly, death is the king of terrors; because they have a fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation, that will devour the adversaries. But believers are delivered from these objects of terror. They see that Christ has brought life and immortality to light, and has opened the kingdom of

heaven to his people. And as they are justified and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, they know that when their earthly tabernacles are dissolved, they will have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Therefore they can say in the language of the apostle, For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord. O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, that giveth me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus it appears, that confidence in Christ is a preservative from all distressing terror and dread; for he is an hiding place from the storm, and a covert from the wind. Hence we may see the value of this confidence, and should earnestly seek to have it in our possession. We shall be the better able to trust in Christ, as we come to have more knowledge of his perfections. As it is written, they that know thy name, will put their trust in thee. The object of the apostle's pursuit, was, that he might know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; that is that he might know him experimentally, and feel the happy effects of his merits and grace. Those know the power of his resurrection, who are so risen with him, as to set their affections on things above: such know the fellowship of his sufferings, who are redeemed from all iniquity, and can so mortify the deeds of the body, as to be crucified unto the world. In this knowledge of Christ, strive to abound more and more. Pray for an increase of faith; that you may have an unshaken confidence in Christ, both in life and in death. Put all the concerns of your salvation into his hands; and then from whatever quarter you may be assailed, you will be able to say, I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep

what I have committed unto him against that day.

Fear not, is an exhortation, not addressed to the ungodly, for such are under the curse of a broken law; the wrath of God abideth on them; they stand on the brink of destruction. They are condemned already, because they have not believed in the only begotten of the Father. All that Christ has done and suffered for a lost world, will rise up in judgement against them; because they have neglected this great salvation. Therefore, because there is wrath beware, lest he take thee away with his stroke; then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Such are exhorted to repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon. God, for Christ's sake, will forgive their iniquities, if they flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them. Then they will be saved from the wrath to come: and their slavish fear, will be changed to filial confidence.

In the words before us, Christ is described as the first and the last. So let him be in all your religious concerns. Let him be all and in all. Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. As to the ground of acceptance with God, determine to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. Count all things loss, compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Make him all your salvation and all your desire. To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious. Whom having not seen ye love, and though ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The apostle says, He died and rose again, that he might be the Lord both of the dead

and living: that whether we live, we should live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we should die unto Him; so that both living and dying, we are the Lord's. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

SERMON XI.

“And Aaron held his peace.” — LEVIT. x. 3.

WORDS fitly spoken, says Solomon, are like apples of gold in pictures of silver: and under some circumstances, silence is as much to be admired and commended. There is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence; and every thing is beautiful in its season. And at the time to which the words before us refer, it was seasonable for Aaron to hold his peace. A little before this period, the Tabernacle had been erected for divine worship; and at its consecration, Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle, and came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt offering upon the altar; which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces. What the people saw, indicated that the divine presence was with them; that their sacrifices were accepted; and that God had made the Tabernacle the place where his honour should dwell. But after these tokens of joy and gladness, there was a very awful occurrence: Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire

therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is what the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. When he heard the reason assigned for this awful visitation, he did not break out into any bitter complaint; he did not utter one murmuring word; but exercised calm resignation to the will of heaven. Hence his silence is admirable and instructive; it is an example, for all who are involved in any afflictive dispensation.

It was a very heavy affliction that had fallen upon Aaron. Death had made an inroad on his family; and in more than one instance; for two of his sons had been taken away at a stroke. And these were his two eldest sons, whom from their rank and station, he might have expected, would promote the honour and prosperity of his family; and be the support of his declining years. They had been consecrated to the service of the Tabernacle; and a short time before, they had been selected with Moses and himself, to stand on the mount in the presence of God; and one of them was likely to be the next High Priest, which among the Jews, was a dignity next to the throne: so that he had reason to expect, that they would establish the lasting honour of his family. But those pleasing hopes and expectations, were blasted, by their premature death. And what would make this more distressing, they had not died a natural death: in this case there had been some alleviation, by considering, that death comes in the common course of nature, that it is the way of all flesh, the inevitable doom of the human race. But his sons had been killed and slain, by an unexpected occurrence. And what was more grievous, they had not

come to their end in any honourable way; not in the accomplishment of any laudable design; but under as much infamy and disgrace, as if they had fallen by the hand of the common executioner. Moreover, they had died a violent death, for they had fallen a prey to devouring fire. But what was the most deplorable, they died in their transgression, without having any time for repentance, and under the visible displeasure of heaven: for a fire from the Lord consumed them, in the very act of their presumption; making it manifest, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: for our God is a consuming fire. This would wring the heart of a pious parent, with the keenest anguish. Yet under this heavy affliction, Aaron was so meek and resigned, that he held his peace.

It might have been expected, that he would have been overwhelmed by this sudden calamity; and would have given way to inconsolable grief, and bitter complaint: for this has often been done, even by such as had the fear of God before their eyes. When Herod slew the children in Bethlehem, that prediction was fulfilled, In Rama, there was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted. The prophet Jonah said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Job opened his mouth and cursed his day; and said, Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life to him that is bitter of soul. Let the day perish in which I was born: let darkness and the shadow of death stain it.—But Aaron's mind was so supported by suitable reflections, that he held his peace.

If Aaron had not been of a meek and quiet spirit, he might have found many plausible excuses for complaint. In palliation of the conduct of his sons, he might have pleaded, their inexperience in the service of the tabernacle; he might have said it was

an act of inadvertency, and not done out of any evil design. But if what they had done was a wilful transgression, a punishment less severe might have answered the purpose of justice; a punishment might have been inflicted, that would have spared their lives, and secured their future obedience; and which would not have entailed so much infamy upon his family. But in these respects, Aaron sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. In patience he possessed his soul, and therefore he held his peace.

No doubt, one inducement to keep silent, was, that he saw the hand of God in this affliction: the young men had been consumed by a fire from the Lord. And Aaron knew that the Judge of all the earth would do right; for there is no unrighteousness with God. His judgements may be unsearchable and past finding out, but when darkness and clouds are round about him, justice and judgement are the habitation of his throne. Aaron might likewise be induced to keep silence, because he saw his sons had committed a grievous crime. A fire from heaven had been kindled on the altar of burnt-offerings, which was always to be kept burning, and never put out: and no other fire was to be used in their religious services. But in neglect of this ordinance, or in contempt of it, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord. It might be rendered, profane fire, for common fire was a profanation of the holy sanctuary. It is said, they did that which God commanded them not; which denotes, either that there was a command against it, or no command for it. In either case, it was an act of disobedience to God; for when he states how his worship is to be performed, to do it in any other way, is a violation of his command. Every thing relating to the service of the tabernacle, was prescribed by the word of the Lord; and those who ministered in that holy place, were to do as the Lord had spoken.

None of these divine injunctions were to be violated with impunity. If any person erred in the service of God through ignorance, they were appointed to bring a sin-offering, by which means they might obtain forgiveness. But the Almighty declared, that the soul which did anything presumptuously, should be cut off from among his people : because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall be utterly cut off ; his iniquity shall be upon him. As the sons of Aaron were in the priests' office, they must have known both the divine command, and the penalty to be inflicted for disobedience : so that when they offered incense with unhallowed fire, it was a sin of presumption. Such a profanation of the divine ordinance, in their case, can only be accounted for, by supposing them to have been in a state of intoxication. This is probable, because, when the funeral was over, the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle ; that ye may put difference between holy and unholy. As this command was given on that occasion, it would appear, that Nadab and Abihu, by the use of wine or strong drink, had become incapable of distinguishing between holy and unholy. And when Aaron considered the great wickedness which his sons had committed, he held his peace.

He might also be induced to keep silence by the consideration, that the punishment which had been inflicted was expedient, and would prove salutary. It was requisite, that the sin of these young men should not go unpunished. They had set a bad example in the face of all Israel, when assembled for public worship, and were favoured with the visible tokens of the divine presence. When, under these circumstances, Nadab and Abihu offered profane fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not

to do, it went to say, that the divine ordinances might be profaned with impunity; that in acts of worship, men might follow their own inclinations, without any regard to the divine injunctions; that there was no need for fire to come from heaven upon the altar, as common fire would equally answer the purpose. If such transgression had not been punished, religion would have been polluted at the fountain-head, and divine worship would have been brought into contempt in the eyes of all the people; at a time when public worship was newly established among them, and in the place which God had chosen for his habitation, and had honoured with his special presence. To prevent those evil effects, it was requisite to punish such presumptuous transgression.

This awful visitation would have a salutary influence; by this means, the people would learn that the Almighty was a jealous God, and would not suffer his worship to be profaned: that he was greatly to be feared, and to be held in reverence by all those that are about him; that he will be sanctified in them that come nigh unto him, and be glorified by all his worshippers. By this exemplary punishment, the people would learn, that God is of purer eyes than to behold sin without indignation; that it kindles a fire in his wrath, that will burn to the lowest hell. They would learn likewise, that God is no respecter of persons; for the sons of Aaron and the nephews of Moses, when found guilty, were not suffered to escape. This might have a good effect upon Aaron's surviving sons, and upon the nation in general: for when God inflicts his judgements, it is, that the people may learn righteousness. So when Aaron considered these things, he held his peace.

The resignation of Aaron, when involved in distress, is left on record for our instruction. His conduct is to be imitated by all believers; for they are to be followers of them, who through faith and

patience inherit the promises. While they are in the world, they may expect tribulation. Christ himself was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs: and it is enough that the servant be as his Lord, and the disciple as his Master. And as they have to be exercised with trouble and affliction, they have need of patience, that after they have done the will of God, they may inherit the promises.

The patience required of Christians does not imply, that they are not to feel their calamity: religion is not intended to destroy natural sensibility; the most pious may have a thorn in the flesh, and their hearts may be pierced with many sorrows; and every heart knows its own bitterness. Though Aaron held his peace, there is no doubt, that he felt his affliction, both as a man and a parent. He did not eat of the sin-offering, as the law required him to do; and when Moses questioned him concerning this neglect, he said, Such things have befallen me this day, that if I had eaten, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord? And when Moses heard that, he was content; he admitted that the heaviness of his heart unfitted him for such a duty. So there may be a deep sense of affliction, when there is sincere resignation to the will of God. And those who have the keenest sense of affliction, are to hold their peace.

One inducement to this silence, is the consideration, that all afflictions are sent from above. The Almighty rules among the armies of heaven, and doeth what pleaseth him among the children of men. Hence the prophet says, Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it? This is not to be understood of moral evil, but of the evil which men are made to suffer: for God is not the author of sin; he is not tempted with iniquity; neither tempteth he any man. But what men are made to suffer, is either by his agency, or by his permission. In the

afflictions of the righteous, wicked men or evil angels may be the instruments, but they can only execute the divine will. Satan could not have afflicted Job, if the Almighty had not removed his protecting hand, which had been as a hedge about him ; and about his house, and about all that he had on every side. Our Saviour declared that his enemies could have had no power against him, if it had not been given them from above. St. Peter says, he was delivered into their hands by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. And in the same light God's people are to view their calamities. When Joseph's brethren had sold him into slavery, he said, it was God that sent him into Egypt. When Job's flocks and herds were stolen by robbers, he said, the Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away. When David was bitterly reviled by Shemei, he said, Let him curse, for God has bidden him. And as afflictions are sent from heaven, those who murmur and complain, do in effect find fault with the divine government : and the apostle says, Who art thou that repliest against God ? Who will venture to complain of the counsels of heaven ? The consideration of the divine government, has silenced the complaints of God's people in all ages. When the armies of Israel were routed, and Eli's sons slain in battle, he said, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. When David was greatly involved in calamity, he says to the Almighty, I was silent, because thou didst it. Our Saviour submitted to his sufferings, that he might do the will of him that sent him. He said, The cup that my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it ? Hence he was led as a lamb to the slaughter ; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. In this respect he suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In this way his followers learn to hold their peace, by the exercise of resignation to God.

This resignation is not produced by a consideration only of what God is in himself, but likewise, of the relation in which he stands to his people. He is their Creator; and therefore they have no right to find fault, with the circumstances in which they are placed, by his will and pleasure. Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour? And cannot the Creator do the same?—God's people are under his providential care and government, which he conducts according to the counsel of his own will. The whole plan of providence cannot be brought within the compass of man's comprehension, and as he cannot take in the whole at one view, he cannot properly judge of its parts. O the depths of the knowledge and wisdom of God! how unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out? He only knows what is fittest to be done, and he never calls in the aid of human advice. Who has known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? It is his place to direct all events, and man's province is silent submission. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.—The Almighty is the benefactor of his people; they receive the most valuable gifts from his bountiful hand; so that though they are a people that have seen affliction, yet they are children of many mercies. This consideration induced Job to exercise patience. He said, We receive good at the hand of the Lord, shall we not also receive evil?

The Almighty is the guide of his people in the journey of life; hence they are to commit themselves to his guidance and direction. It is not in man to direct his steps; therefore in all thy ways acknowledge God, and he will direct thy paths, David says, God shall guide me by his counsel all my days.

But in order to this, there must be submission to his will, for it is the meek that he will teach his way. Those who need his guidance are not to choose their own way; they are not to dictate to their guide; nor to find fault with the path in which they are led. Their way may be rough and thorny, crooked and perplexed; yet it is the best for them; for God leads his people the right way to the city of habitation. Thus by considering the relation in which they stand to the Almighty, they learn to hold their peace.

The people of God may learn to be silent in affliction, by taking a view of the sin they have committed, and the punishment they have deserved. After sin has been pardoned, it is to be remembered with humiliation. To the Jewish nation it is said, I will establish my covenant with thee, that thou mayest remember and be confounded, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God. Such are never to lose sight of their own unworthiness, but to remember the rock from whence they were hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence they were dug. After St. Paul was called to the apostleship, he remembered with self-abasement, that he had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: so that he regarded himself as the chief of sinners. After men have obtained acceptance with God, they may have many failings and infirmities; in many things they may offend; even their holy things may have need of cleansing; so that if God was strict to mark iniquity, they could not stand before him. It was this consideration that humbled Job; he had made many bitter complaints, but by a proper view of his own unworthiness, he was brought to resignation; then he answered the Lord and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eyes see thee: wherefore I abhor myself and

repent as in dust and ashes. Jeremiah says, Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin? Micah says, I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned. So when any of the people of God call their sins to remembrance, they see they have no reason to complain of their afflictions; because they are in a better state than they have deserved; for they have deserved utter destruction: so that they may say, It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed; and because his compassion fails not, that we are yet in the land of the living. In this way they will learn to hold their peace, so far as to refrain from all complaint: if they speak, it will be to acknowledge how much they are indebted to the grace of God, and to say, I am less than the least of all thy mercies; and not worthy the truth thou hast shown unto thy servant.

Another inducement to resignation, is the spiritual benefits which afflictions produce. They are sent on errands of mercy. Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; and scourges every son that he receiveth. This he would not do were it not to promote their spiritual welfare; for like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. It is true, that no chastisement for the present is joyous, but grievous; but it afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. In reference to afflictions, St. Paul says, All things work together for good, to them that love God. Hence it is written, Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth. This is what David had proved by experience; he says, it is good for me to have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Prosperity has led many to forsake

the fountain of living waters ; and hew out to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water : but sanctified affliction corrects these evils. It removes pride from man, that he may be clothed with humility as with a garment ; it teaches men the vanity of the world, that they may set their affections on things above ; it makes them more frequent and earnest at a throne of grace, and removes what hindered their intercourse with God ; in order that they may cleave unto the Lord, with purpose of heart ; and make him the portion of their souls. Job anticipated such advantages from his affliction, for he says, when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. Christ is said to bring his people through the fire, that he may purify them as silver. And St. Peter says, If need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations ; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Hence it appears that afflictions are sent to the people of God to promote their growth in grace ; the most valuable acquisition they can obtain on this side of heaven ; and the consideration of this inestimable benefit, is to teach them to hold their peace.

Another inducement to silence in trouble, is the hope of a certain and speedy deliverance. Though many are the afflictions of the righteous, yet out of them all the Lord delivereth them. In the course of life, the people of God experience many signal deliverances, in reference to which it is said, Call upon me in the day of trouble ; and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Hence, however they are encompassed with dangers, or assailed by their enemies, they can say, The God whom we serve is able to deliver us. Thou art my hiding place ; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. But this will be more especially the case at

the end of life : then their deliverance will be complete and everlasting. When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, where they might have expected certain destruction, Moses said, Fear not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you to-day : for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. But this, in a higher degree, is applicable to believers when they pass over Jordan. Then their warfare is accomplished, and all their afflictions terminated. The wicked will cease to trouble them, and there the weary are at rest. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord ; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. And this is a deliverance that is fast approaching. Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. And the night is far spent ; and the day is at hand. By such reflections, the hearts of God's people are established with grace ; and thus in affliction, they learn to hold their peace.

Another inducement to resignation, is the prospect of a future reward. The apostle says, God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt : for he had respect to the recompense of the reward. The people of God will not only be delivered out of all their troubles, but they will be rewarded for them. Hence St. James says, Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to all that love him. When our Saviour spake of the troubles, in which his followers would be involved, he said, Rejoice and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven. The reward is enhanced by all the sufferings which are patiently endured. Hence

the apostle says, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. So that all the trials of God's people, are preparing them for a brighter crown in heaven. Hence the darkest scenes below, will turn out the brightest in the world to come. And while believers contemplate this happy and glorious result of all their afflictions, they learn, like Aaron, to hold their peace.

Resignation in adversity, is also a reasonable service; and a duty that is justly required, of all the followers of Christ; as it is profitable unto the soul, as it is pleasing and honourable unto God, and as it is not above their ability, considering the assistance that is given from above. God giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. He says, as thy day is, so shall thy strength be. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Those who are thus assisted, can bear their trials without repining or complaint. As they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; they can run with patience the race set before them. Though they have to pass through deep waters, yet they can say with the apostle, None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these

things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.

The practice of murmuring and repining, is unprofitable and vain : it neither removes, nor lessens any affliction : it aggravates the malady, and prevents it from producing any beneficial result. It is likewise sinful ; it violates the precepts of the gospel ; it discredits religion ; and grieves the Spirit of God. It is one of the unfruitful works of darkness, that must be laid aside by all the children of light. And in order to do this effectually, Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

It is allowed that St. James recommends patience, under the appellation of wisdom : by this term it may be expressed, as it discovers so much prudence and discretion on the part of man, and is the result of divine instruction ; which all should be careful to obtain. St. Paul says, I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. This was not a natural endowment, but an art he had acquired. And this is equally true of patience, which is a science to be acquired. And if any man lack this wisdom, let him ask it of God : that is, let him pray that he may know it to be his duty, and how it is to be performed. The promise to Zion is, All thy children shall be taught of the Lord : and such as are thus taught, learn resignation to the will of Heaven. Patience is likewise learned from the example of Christ, who was made perfect through suffering, which he endured with perfect resignation. And he says, Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Those who learn of him to have a meek and quiet spirit, will find rest from distressing agitation of mind : a rest in the assurance of the divine favour : and they will be prepared for an eternal rest in heaven, which is the rest that remains to the people of God.

SERMON XII.

“**BUT** God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—GAL. VI. 14.

WHEN Paul preached in the region of Galatia, his ministry was attended with great success ; many embraced the gospel, and a Church was established on Christian principles ; but after Paul's departure, some teachers affirmed, that unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. This went to say, that Christ had not made a sufficient sacrifice for sin : hence the apostle declared it to be a subversion of the Christian religion. He likewise charges these teachers with duplicity ; affirming that they did not enforce circumcision from any regard they had to the ceremonial law, but from a motive of worldly policy. He says, As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, constrain you to be circumcised ; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised, keep the law ; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. They did this merely to obtain the favour of the Jews, and worldly applause ; and when they had succeeded, they boasted of their success. To such conduct the apostle declared his utter aversion ; and exclaimed, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The term, cross, is used in scripture to denote any severe trial, or grievous calamity ; in which sense

the followers of Christ are to take up their cross : and this might be called the cross of Christ, as it is endured for his sake : but the apostle is not here to be understood of what believers suffer for Christ, but of what Christ has suffered for them ; this appears by the drift of his discourse. He had been speaking, just before, of the course which some pursued, lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ ; and the only cross for which Christians were persecuted was that on which the Saviour himself was crucified. But as all the trials of God's people are termed the cross they have to bear, so the cross of Christ may denote all that he suffered in the work of redemption ; whether it was bodily tribulation or mental anguish.

In speaking of the sufferings of Christ, his cross may be mentioned, to bring to remembrance the death which he accomplished at Jerusalem : there he was crucified in company with two malefactors ; as if he had committed some enormous crime, that required him to be made such a dreadful example of, as a warning to others.

The cross may be used to denote all the sufferings of Christ, because his pain and anguish were there carried to so great an extremity, as to deprive him of life. From the commencement of his public ministry, he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs. He was despised and rejected of men, and had to bear their hatred and contempt ; and their bitterest calumny and reproach ; and he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts, and the baseness of their ingratitude : and at the destruction they were bringing upon themselves. So that when he beheld Jerusalem, he wept over it, and said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !

His sorrows multiplied after the rulers of the Jews had resolved to put him to death, on a charge of treason against the state, and of blasphemy against God. A band of armed men was sent to apprehend him, as if he had been a dangerous incendiary ; on this account he meekly expostulated with them, saying, Are ye come out as against a thief, to take me with swords and staves ? Into the hands of these armed men he was betrayed by one of his own disciples ; another disciple scandalously denied him with oaths and curses ; the rest of the disciples forsook him and fled ; in this sense, he trod the wine-press alone, for of his people there were none with him. After his apprehension, he was treated with insult and indignity. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him ; others covered his eyes and smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who it is that smote thee. Herod the king, and his men of war, mocked him and set him at nought. He was then cruelly bound and led away to Pilate the Roman governor. Pilate could find no fault in him, yet he delivered him to be scourged : and when covered with blood and wounds, he brought him forth to the people and said, Behold the man ! But this sight produced no compassion in the multitude ; they still cried, Away with him ; crucify him, crucify him ! To the barbarous punishment of crucifixion he was condemned ; and was compelled to bear his cross towards the place of execution, till he fainted under the load. After all this suffering he still survived, and would have recovered, if greater torture had not been inflicted upon him : but his sufferings on the cross were more than nature could sustain. He was fastened to the cross by nails driven through his hands and feet ; the cross was then fixed in the ground, in an upright position ; which left the whole weight of his body hanging upon his wounds. And in all this extremity

of torture he continued to suffer, perhaps for the space of six hours. Human nature shudders at the view of such barbarous cruelty, as was inflicted on the Saviour, when with wicked hands he was crucified and slain.

The sufferings of Christ may be called his cross, as there was then the most visible display of them. It is true indeed, that all his sufferings on the cross were not visible; and probably the greatest of them was what no man could see; for he bore the curse of the law; and such was the anguish of his spirit, that he exclaimed, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But still there was a more visible display of his sufferings on the cross, than anywhere else. When his enemies came to take him, he said, This is your hour and the power of darkness: this might imply, that evil spirits, the rulers of the darkness of this world, were permitted, in some extraordinary way, to wage war against him; but this was a spiritual conflict which no mortal could see.

He suffered unspeakable anguish, before he fell into the hands of his enemies; his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; and he kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: and being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as if it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. But this was not done in public, but in private; during the shadows of the night, and in a very solitary place. But the crucifixion took place in the middle of the day, and in the open view of multitudes of people, which came up to Jerusalem at the Passover. St. Luke says, When they were come to Calvary there they crucified him; and the people stood beholding: and the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others, let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. The soldiers also mocked him, saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

The sufferings of Christ may be called his cross, because there they came to a termination. Having hung on the cross, till all was accomplished for which he came into the world, he cried with a loud voice, saying, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; and when he had thus spoken, he gave up the ghost. And when his enemies had killed the body, there was no more that they could do. He could no more be subjected to pain and sorrow. The doleful scene of his sufferings was ended; and these sufferings were what the apostle calls the cross of Christ; in which he was resolved to glory: that is, he would view them with rapture, and speak of them with exultation.

But extreme suffering considered in itself, is more likely to excite sorrow than joy. When punishment is inflicted on a criminal, it draws nothing but tears from compassionate spectators. If they are obliged to confess, that the punishment is richly deserved, yet still they cannot but grieve, for a fellow creature in distress. And there is more cause for grief, when punishment is inflicted on an innocent person; more especially if that person was kind, and tender hearted, and went about doing good, as was the case with our Saviour. In what light then could the apostle contemplate the sufferings of Christ, when he found them such a source of joy and gladness? Before we reply to this, it may be observed, that crucifixion was not only a painful death, but likewise one of the greatest degradation. It was often thought too infamous for robbers and murderers, unless they were likewise slaves, or persons regarded as worthless and contemptible. Hence the doctrine of the cross, taught by the apostle, appeared mean and despicable in the eyes of the world. In reference to this the apostle says, The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. The Jews expected that the Messiah

would appear surrounded with worldly grandeur: on this account, his death on the cross, became to them a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. The Greeks sought after earthly science, which they could not reconcile with the doctrine of a crucified Saviour; hence they regarded the preaching of the cross of Christ, as extreme folly, which ought to be despised and rejected, by all reasonable and honourable men. But the apostle was not ashamed of the gospel, though its author had died upon the accursed tree: he was so far from being ashamed of it, he determined to glory in the cross of Christ, and in that only.

The reason of this was, he knew its intrinsic excellence, its benevolent design, the great work it would accomplish, and the benefits it would produce, in earth, and in heaven, in time, and in eternity. The scriptures teach, that the death of Christ made reconciliation for iniquity. The Messiah was cut off, not for himself, but for the sins of the people. He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. He was wounded for our transgressions; and bruised for our iniquities. He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. He appeared in the end of time, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This is what all the sacrifices under the law could not accomplish; the blood of bulls and of goats, could not take away sin: and if sin had not been taken away, the human race could not have escaped eternal perdition. Therefore those who view the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, will joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom they have received the atonement: or in other words, they will glory in the cross of Christ.

One excellence of the cross of Christ, is the confirmation it gives to divine truth, by the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. The prophets testified before-

hand, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Isaiah, for instance, says, The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was cut off out of the land of the living. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief. He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied: he shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. He hath poured out his soul unto death: he was numbered with transgressors, and made intercession for them. All these predictions were remarkably fulfilled, when Christ died on the cross; which proves that prophecy did not come by the will of man; but holy men of old, wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. So that the scriptures are given by inspiration of God, and are able to make men wise unto salvation.

Another excellence of the cross of Christ, is, that it was the commencement of a new dispensation; it brought in a better covenant, established upon better promises. The ceremonial law was a burden the fathers were not able to bear; but all these rites are abrogated by the sacrifice of Christ. Hence the apostle says, Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Christ was the substance of all that had been shadowed forth in the legal services. By the shedding of his blood, which cleanseth from all sin, he superseded all the oblations and sprinklings of the Tabernacle.

“Aaron may lay his robes aside,

His mitre and his vest,

Since Christ himself came down to be,

The offering and the priest.”

The death of Christ might be said to consecrate every region for divine worship. Religious solemnities

were then no longer to be confined to one temple, and one people; for a spiritual worship was introduced, equally adapted to every place; and which might be everywhere performed with acceptance to God, and with efficacy to the souls of men. Hence Christ says, Where two or three are met in my name, there am I in the midst of them. The ceremonial law had been a wall of separation between the Jew and the gentile, this was now put away, that they might become one fold, under one shepherd; that they might be all one in Christ Jesus. The death of Christ was the signal to preach the gospel to the gentile nations; by which means, the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light: and to them that were in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up. In these respects, the apostle had reason to glory in the cross of Christ.

Another excellence of the cross, is, the manifestation it makes of the divine perfections. The glory of God is seen in the face of Christ. Even the Mount of Transfiguration, when the countenance of Christ shone like the sun, did not display so much of the divine glory, as Mount Calvary does to the eye of faith. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork: on this account when he laid the foundations of the earth, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. But the work of redemption completed on the cross, brings more glory to the Almighty: as it was more glorious to rescue immortal souls from endless misery, than it was at first to give them existence.

The cross of Christ displays divine wisdom: as it magnifies the law and makes it honourable, when the penalty is not inflicted on the transgressor. As it makes the exercise of the greatest mercy consistent with the strictest justice; and as it secures future obedience more effectually by the pardon of sin,

than could have been done by the punishment of the guilty. It does this by producing a love to God, which is the fulfilling of the law : not a substitute for it, but a divine principle from which obedience proceeds ; that obedience, which is the most delightful to man, and the most acceptable to God. This is the wisdom of God in a mystery.

The cross of Christ, is a display of divine power. When Christ was made perfect through sufferings, he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil : and to deliver those who through fear of death were subject to bondage. By his death on the cross, he bruised the head of the old serpent ; he made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He took away the sting of death, he opened the prison to them that were bound ; he delivered immortal souls from going down to the pit, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them by his death on the cross. Hence the apostle calls, Christ crucified, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

The cross of Christ displays divine justice : it shows that sin does not go unpunished. When the bitter cup could not pass from Christ, it proved that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for our God is a consuming fire. When Christ suffered for our offences, divine justice received satisfaction that was adequate and complete : more complete than it could have been, by any punishment inflicted on the guilty.

But if the cross of Christ makes one divine attribute shine brighter than the rest, it is that of God's love. We have many displays of divine love in our creation, in our preservation, and in all the blessings of this life, but above all in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. For God so loved

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. This is that love that surpasseth knowledge, and will for ever remain a mystery to men and to angels. And as the cross of Christ brings glory to God in the highest, it is a proper subject of exultation.

The cross of Christ, is the source of his own mediatorial glory. We see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. As he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He is the head over all things to the church; all things are put under his feet. He is exalted far above all principality and power. At his ascension it was said, Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. John heard the heavenly host, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. This honour he receives, because he has redeemed us to God by his own blood; and hence it is proper to glory in his cross.

The cross of Christ has likewise this excellence, it is the source of all the new covenant blessings, which are bestowed on mankind. In particular, it is the source of pardoning mercy: God, for Christ's sake, forgives men their iniquities. Without the shedding of his blood there could have been no re-

mission: hence it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Paul says, We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. The cross of Christ is likewise the source of sanctification. If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God? He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity; and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. On the cross a fountain was opened for sin and uncleanness, which cleanseth from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; and brings men to fellowship with God; for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin; that we may walk in the light, as God is in the light, and have fellowship one with another. From the cross of Christ men derive a title to heaven, and a meetness for it: all who are now in glory, have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. Hence it may be seen, that there is much reason to glory in the cross of Christ.

But this cannot be done by such as are strangers to regenerating grace. While people remain in this state, the gospel is as a light shining in a dark place, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. While the veil is upon the heart, the cross becomes of none effect. Christ appears as a root out of a dry ground, that has no beauty nor comeliness in him to make him be desired. Before men can glory in what Christ

has done and suffered for them, they must see their need of a Saviour. They must see and feel their guilt and condemnation, their danger of destruction, and their own utter helplessness; and as this humbles the sinner, it exalts the Saviour, and teaches them to appreciate his merits and grace. Another truth to be received, before men can glory in the cross of Christ, is the atonement he made for sin, by his sufferings and death: for it is only as he was made sin for us, that we can be made the righteousness of God in him: it is only as he bore our iniquities, in his body on the tree, that by his stripes we can be healed: it is only so far as he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he can bring us to God. Unless Christ suffered in the sinner's room and stead, there would be no more reason to glory in his cross, than in the cross of St. Peter, or any of the martyrs.

Another doctrine to be received before men can glory in the cross of Christ, is that of his divine nature: that he was God manifest in the flesh. No creature could have saved immortal souls from eternal destruction, he could not have given to God a ransom for them. It was the divinity of Christ, that gave infinite merit to his sufferings and death. It is this that makes him the foundation of his people's confidence, and the source of their joy and exultation.

It is however, not the mere notion of these doctrines, that will avail; they must be revealed to the heart by the Spirit of God. When Peter came to the true knowledge of Christ, our Saviour said, Flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven. So he that commanded light to shine out of darkness, must shine into the hearts of men, that they may know the things which are freely given them of God. The truth revealed by the Spirit, must be received by faith; for it is he that believeth that shall be saved. Faith is not to be understood of a mere assent to the truth, it includes

a confidence in Christ, as a free, a present, and an all-sufficient Saviour. To you that thus believe, he is precious. Whom having not seen, ye love; and though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The ungodly cannot glory in the cross of Christ, because they have no participation in his merits and grace: for what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial? All the workers of iniquity are enemies to the cross of Christ; and it has an awful aspect towards them: it shows that their sins are inexcusable; and are aggravated by rejecting the remedy which heaven has provided. If they perished who despised Moses' law, of how much sorer punishment will they be counted worthy, who have trod under foot the blood of Christ? So that if the ungodly could discover the excellencies of the cross, they could not glory in it, because it leaves them in their guilty state, and increases their condemnation. Before men can glory in the cross, they must receive Christ as their prophet, their priest, and their king. It is to them that receive him, that he gives the power to become the sons of God. Then they are passed from death unto life; and can say, The life that I live, is by faith in the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself for me. And such as these, and these only, are able to glory in the cross of Christ.

Those who glory in the cross of Christ, will show it by their deportment; they will make it manifest by their life and conversation. Having lighted a candle, they will not put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light unto all that are in the house. They will arise and shine, because their light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon them. They will make an open avowal of it before the world: and to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them, they will be

ready always to give an answer with meekness and fear. They will not trust in an arm of flesh ; they will place no dependence on their own performances, as the meritorious cause of their acceptance with God ; they will count all things loss for Christ ; and be determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. This will inspire their devotions, and mingle with their addresses at a throne of grace. When they make their requests known unto God, by prayer and supplication, they will plead what Christ has done and suffered for them : whether they petition for blessings to be bestowed, or return thanks for favours received, they will do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the fulness of their hearts they will exclaim, Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift : Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever.

Those who glory in the cross of Christ, will recommend it to sinners, as the only way of salvation ; for there is no other name given, by which any can be saved, but the name of Christ. They will recommend what was completed on the cross, as a sure foundation which God has laid in Zion ; as a refuge, to which sinners may flee and be preserved ; as a rest to the weary and heavy laden ; and as a sovereign balm for every wound.

‘ Thus will they tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour they have found ;
They’ll point to his redeeming blood,
And say, Behold the way to God.’

Those who glory in the cross of Christ, will be careful to adorn this doctrine by a holy life and conversation. Some perverted this doctrine, by separating it from holiness of heart and life ; as if it allowed men to live in disobedience to God. To such, the apostle says, Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound ? By no means ; how shall we

who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity. Through the merits of Christ, men are made free from sin, that they may become the servants of God; having their fruit unto holiness and their end eternal life. Christ says, I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me bringeth forth much fruit; but without me ye can do nothing. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. The grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches men to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world.

Those who glory in the cross of Christ, find that God is the portion of their souls, and this keeps them from all undue attachment to the world. Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. In these things the carnally-minded seek all their happiness, and place all their confidence: but in the day of trial, they will be found to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Believers in Christ do not set their hearts upon earthly things. He that is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Faith in Christ procures the divine favour, and the hope of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And those who have this felicity, set their affections on things above, and lay up their treasure in heaven: and then they are able to avow, that they are crucified unto the world, and the world unto them. And such are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Those who can glory in the cross of Christ, will be able to triumph over death. The sting of death is sin: and the strength of sin is the law: but by the work which Christ completed on the cross, his people are delivered from the curse of the law: and this

deprives death of all its terrific power ; it is now conquered and disarmed, and its approach gives no dismay to those who have an unshaken confidence in him who died for them, and rose again : for whether living or dying, they are the Lord's. Hence they can say, For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. For I know that my Redeemer liveth ; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. O Death, where is thy sting ? O Grave, where is thy victory ? Thanks be to God, that giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who glory in the cross of Christ, know it will be the cause of their final acceptance at the bar of God. On this account they can make this solemn declaration,

“ When from the dust of death I rise,
To claim my mansion in the skies,
Even then this shall be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived, hath died for me.”

The cross of Christ will be the subject of the new song in heaven, where the redeemed will sing, Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

In order to make you happy in life, happy in death, and happy in the eternal world, all that is requisite, is to be able to glory in the cross of Christ.

SERMON XIII.

“WHEN the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first.”—LUKE xi. 24—26.

A JUDICIOUS commentator, says, ‘That in explaining the scriptures, and especially the parables, the general scope and intention of the writer is to be regarded, and not every word and syllable of the parable; else the Expositor will lose his time in endeavouring to explain what is inexplicable, or make the author say many things he never intended.’ It is highly requisite to be guided by this rule of interpretation; more particularly so, when the portion of scripture to be explained, is abstruse and obscure; as is the case with that which is now before us. This parable is founded on demoniacal possession, of which many instances are recorded in scripture. Some men were possessed by evil spirits, which grievously tormented them, till they were delivered by a divine power; and even after such a deliverance, they might fall under the same calamity, in a more aggravated state. Whether that was inflicted, in all cases, as a punishment for some turpitude of conduct, there is no evidence to prove; but it appears this was sometimes the case, because the parable was delivered as a warning to the workers of iniquity. The occasion of this parable, was

the great opposition that was made to our Saviour's ministry. He had wrought a miracle on a demoniac ; and when the evil spirit was expelled, the dumb spake, and the people wondered. But some of the Jews said he cast out devils by Beelzebub ; to which he replied, If Satan cast out Satan, how can his kingdom stand ? And in the way of admonition, he delivered the parable that is now before us ; and added, Even so shall it be with this wicked generation. He had before said, If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you : and now he lets them know, that if they continued their malicious opposition to the gospel kingdom, they would forfeit their privileges, be given up to the hardness of their hearts ; and be deeper sunk in sin and misery than they were before : their last state would be worse than the first. The question here is, how far, and in what sense, the parable applies to people at the present day ? There are two kinds of demoniacal possession spoken of in scripture : one is corporeal, and the other mental : in the former, an evil spirit controlled the organs of the human frame ; in the latter, an evil spirit influenced the heart, and instigated it to that which was evil in the sight of God. The effect of the former possession, was dreadful pain and anguish ; the effect of the latter, was sinful thoughts and actions. It is to the latter, or as it may be termed, a spiritual possession, that our remarks will be confined. We shall inquire how far, in this sense, the parable applies to the present generation.

The first clause which here calls for attention, is, *When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man.* This implies a previous possession by the evil spirit, and so far as we are concerned, not of the body, but of the soul. That Satan has power over the hearts of the ungodly, is what the scriptures clearly and strongly maintain. He instigated Judas to betray

Christ; he filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Ghost: he has dominion over all the workers of iniquity, for St. John says, He that committeth sin is of the devil: St. Paul says, The god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel should shine unto them. He likewise declares, that the prince of the power of the air, is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. By this means they become so assimilated to the wicked one, as to be enemies to all righteousness; and full of all subtlety and malice: on which account they are called his children. Our Saviour says, Ye are of your father, the devil, whose works ye do.

The Holy Spirit fills and rules the hearts of God's people; Barnabas, for instance, was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost; and all believers are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit: and the residence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts is evinced by their dispositions; for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. In like manner the residence of the wicked one in the hearts of the ungodly, is manifest by their evil dispositions; by their unbelief and hardness of heart; by their envy, hatred, and malice: by their propensity to iniquity, and their aversion to that which is good. By their fruits ye shall know them. Wherever there is a carnal mind at enmity with God, there Satan has his seat.

The wicked one assails the people of God, but they keep the enemy without: they will not suffer his evil suggestions to lodge within them: they resist the devil, and he flees from them. It is otherwise with the ungodly; Satan has gained admission into the citadel of the heart, where he takes up his residence, and subjects everything to his sway: sinners are led captive by the devil at his will. The corruptions of human nature are the strong-holds, where he

takes up his position, and exercises his dominion. This is a deplorable state ; for it is a state of alienation from God, and of hostility against his government. All such are in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity. Destruction and misery are in their ways ; and the way of peace they know not.

But from this direful thralldom, there is a happy deliverance, when the unclean spirit goeth out of a man. Yet on his part, this is never a voluntary action ; his name is Apollyon, the destroyer ; he goes about seeking whom he may devour ; and when he has once seized his prey, he will never willingly let it escape. Whenever he goes out of a man, it is by compulsion : and he is never expelled by human power. Those who live in sin, have neither inclination nor ability for such an enterprise. The service of Satan affords gratification to their corrupt passions and appetites ; so that they are his willing slaves ; and have no desire to be liberated : and of themselves they have no power to throw off his yoke. They are tied and bound with the chain of their iniquities, till the pitifulness of God's tender mercy loose them. When a strong man armed, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace ; but when a stronger than he cometh upon him, and overcometh him, he taketh from him all his armour, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. Christ is stronger than all the powers of darkness ; and he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. He spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them by his death on the cross ; and it is by the power of his grace, that the unclean spirit is expelled from the heart of man. The gospel is the usual instrument employed ; Paul, speaking of his own mission, says, He was sent to turn men from the power of Satan unto God : for the weapons of our warfare, are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing,

that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity, every thought, to the obedience of Christ. This ministry is to be exercised, that men may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. Before this is accomplished, they are convinced of their guilt and degradation; they see and feel that they are slaves to sin and Satan, and consequently in the way to perdition. In this state they are brought to cry, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! Save Lord, or I perish: God be merciful to me a sinner. And when this conviction and contrition, are followed by faith in Christ, they experience a deliverance; they are translated out of the kingdom of Satan, into the kingdom of God's dear Son: and when the Son makes them free, they are free indeed. No sin has dominion over them; and where sin has no dominion, Satan can have none. In this way the unclean spirit goeth out of a man.

Then he *walketh through dry places*, or desert places, *seeking rest, and finding none*. This figurative description of an evil spirit's operations, is thrown into the parable as a decoration; but though it is not to be literally understood, yet it contains a moral signification: it shows that the human heart, is the most acceptable place of abode to an unclean spirit. One reason of this is, because the heart of man in its corrupt state, is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. All the pollutions there are in the world, come from the heart of man. When all flesh had corrupted its way; and the earth was filled with violence; God looked down from heaven, and saw that every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts, were only evil, and that continually. On this account the heart of man is the most agreeable residence to an unclean spirit.

Another reason of the preference, which an evil spirit gives to the human heart, is because he can there most effectually oppose the designs of the Almighty; for so long as an evil spirit rules in the heart, God's commands are violated; his counsel is rejected; his mercies are abused; his worship is profaned; his truth is corrupted; his grace is despised; his name is dishonoured; and his Spirit is grieved. Men are in a state of rebellion against heaven, and every evil work is produced. This is gratifying to an evil spirit, as he is at enmity with God.

Another reason of the preference which an evil spirit gives to the human heart, is, because he can there do the most injury to man: for he can there effect the destruction of the soul: this is the end of all his devices, and he cannot be satisfied without its accomplishment. It is true, that Satan showed an alacrity in afflicting Job, in his person and temporal concerns; but this was intended to instigate him to wickedness, that it might ruin his soul. But when Job under affliction, sinned not; nor charged God foolishly, the enemy was baffled and mortified; and found he had been labouring on barren ground. If he were permitted to raise destructive tempests, through sea and land; and if earthquake, pestilence, and famine were at his command; he could only kill the body, and then there would be no more that he could do; but by taking up his abode in the heart, he can destroy both body and soul in hell. So that it is in the human heart, where he can most effectually accomplish his malicious designs, which is the *rest* he is seeking for; and on this account, every other region is to him a desert place, where he finds no rest.

Then he saith, I will return to my house whence I came out: and when he cometh, he findeth it *swept and garnished*. How is this to be understood? Commentators say, that the evil spirit found his former habitation swept of every religious principle;

destitute of every gracious disposition ; and garnished with all manner of sinful propensities, and wicked habits, including an evil tongue, and a malicious heart ; forming a suitable abode for an unclean spirit, who only takes up with ready furnished lodgings. This would be consistent, if the drift of the parable was confined to the case of a demoniac, properly so called ; or a bodily possession by an evil spirit ; because after such a spirit was cast out, the man might fall into transgression, for which he might be punished, by the return of the same demon with other evil spirits. But it is allowed that the scope of the parable applies likewise, to such an expulsion of an evil spirit, as takes place when a sinner is converted to God. Yet when it is so applied, it is a great mistake to suppose, that the human heart is destitute of all the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and full of iniquity, during the absence of the evil spirit ; for men are only under the influence of sin, when they are under the influence of satan. The scriptures attribute all sin to his agency ; when the tares appeared among the wheat it is said, the enemy that sowed them is the devil : this is equally true in every other case, where sin is practised ; for he that committeth sin is of the devil. Wherever sin reigns, there satan reigns. He that is born of God sinneth not ; he keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not : that is so long as he keeps himself from sin, so long he keeps himself from Satan, and no longer : for wherever sinful habits are indulged, there Satan has the dominion. The notion, that the wicked one only takes up with ready furnished lodgings, is erroneous ; for he overcame our first parents in paradise ; and he even assailed our Saviour, who said, the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. The desire which an evil spirit has to enter the heart of man, is for the sake of the mischief he can do there ; so that he could have no motive to enter, if his work could be done

as well without him as with him. Where the unclean spirit has been cast out of a man by regenerating grace, the heart will be free from sin, having its fruit unto holiness. Therefore when this parable is applied to spiritual possession, the only way to avoid incongruity, and to make the parable consistent with itself, and with other parts of scripture, is to understand, that when the evil spirit returns to his former habitation, he finds it empty of evil, swept of all its polutions, and garnished with divine grace; with such ornaments as are, in God's sight, of great price. It is a good thing for the heart to be so established with grace; yet this will not prevent the enemy from striving to obtain an entrance; nor does it always prevent his success.

So, *he goeth and taketh to him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself.* Among fallen angels, some may be more wicked than others; because some may have larger capacities, which will contain more evil. Those who were the highest before the fall, may be most wicked since that event. Out of these he selected seven; which were as many as he could obtain, or as many as he judged would be adequate to his purpose. As the heart which he intended to attack, was strongly fortified, with religious principles, and good resolutions, he might expect powerful resistance. On this account he collects additional forces, that he might invest the citadel on all sides; and in order to be more sure of victory, and more speedy in his conquest.

The result is, these evil spirits *enter in and dwell there.* By this, is not to be understood, that the enemy always succeeds in his attempts to gain the possession of the human heart; if he always succeeded, every heart would be subject to his sway, for all are repeatedly assailed by his subtlety and malice. No degree of holiness can preserve a man from temptation: Christ himself was led into the

wilderness to be tempted of the devil; how then can any of his followers expect to escape? But notwithstanding all the assaults of the wicked one, there are many that hold on their way; and in the Lord grow stronger and stronger. When the messenger of Satan buffeted St. Paul, he found the grace of Christ sufficient for him; and so do all who cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart; Satan will be bruised under their feet, and they will come off more than conquerors, through him that has loved them. We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, which prove, that the enterprises of Satan are often baffled and defeated.

When it is stated, that evil spirits enter in and dwell there; it is not to be understood, that they do this forcibly, against the will of the man himself. In cases of bodily possession, it was otherwise; a man had no power to avoid it; but that was not his sin, but his punishment. Nothing can be done, that militates against a man's salvation, except by his own concurrence. So that in the case of spiritual possession, it is always a man's fault, when the enemy accomplishes his purpose. All that an evil spirit can do, in order to vanquish the human heart, is to employ temptation: and the apostle says, There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, and will with the temptation also make a way to escape. If Satan could subdue the human heart by force, man could not be in a state of probation; he could not be accountable to God for his conduct; it would be unreasonable, and preposterous to bring his works into judgement; all the warnings and admonitions of scripture would be to no purpose; all vigilance and circumspection would be unavailing; and he that walketh uprightly, would not walk surely; and all the promises of divine protection would fail of

accomplishment. It follows therefore, incontestibly, that whenever the enemy gains possession of the heart, there is always a voluntary, and consequently a culpable yielding on the part of man. He has himself opened the door, by which the entrance has been effected.

When it is said of evil spirits, that they enter in and dwell there ; it is not to be supposed that it is all the work of a moment. In the case of bodily possession, no doubt, that was instantaneous ; but not so with respect to a spiritual possession ; that is a gradual work, it is done by degrees, and at intervals ; and it often puts the enemy's perseverance to the test. Such a relapse often commences in a neglect of that injunction, *Keep thy heart with all diligence* ; for out of it are the issues of life : instead of the mind being staid upon God, vain thoughts are suffered to lodge there. In the next place, the means of grace are less resorted to than formerly, or they are attended with less devotion. Then self-denial declines ; watchfulness is relaxed ; and self-examination much neglected. There is then less affection for the cause and people of God ; and more conformity to the world. Then the conscience becomes less tender, by which means lesser irregularities are ventured upon, which prepares the way for greater improprieties. Those who have declined so far, are ready, under some powerful temptation, to fall away : yet even in the last stage, there are various gradations in falling from grace. Some strong enticement is presented to the mind by the enemy ; then the first impropriety on the part of man, is to keep his attention fixed on the forbidden object, instead of discarding it at once ; and by keeping the attention fixed upon the allurement, desires towards it are produced ; and if these are not checked in time, the consent of the will is obtained ; and the next step is wilful transgression. Then every barrier is removed which

kept the enemy without ; so he enters the heart, as his own habitation, and dwells there. The way in which religious people may fall from their steadfastness, is greatly diversified ; but in whatever manner this change is effected, *The last state of that man is worse than the first.* If after such have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, their latter end is worse with them than the beginning : for it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

When men fall into apostacy from God, their iniquity is more aggravated ; as they had been laid under the greatest obligations ; they had been illuminated ; they had received the heavenly gift ; and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. They had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come : hence when they fall away, they are guilty of the basest ingratitude ; their sin is committed against greater light and knowlege, for a light from heaven had shone into their hearts ; and they violate the most solemn vows, and covenant engagements. On these accounts their guilt is increased to an extent, that is inscrutable or inconceivable.

Their last state is worse than the first ; because they do more injury to the cause of God. They bring a bad report upon the good land : they cause it to be suspected, that there is no reality in religion, nor any sincerity among its professors. Their conduct hardens other sinners in their crimes ; it lays a stumbling-block in the way of weak Christians ; and it prevents others from setting out on their way to the kingdom, lest they should fall after the same example of unbelief. Their conduct is a great source of grief and discouragement to the people of God ; and it causeth the uncircumcised to rejoice, and to take

occasion from it, to set their mouths against the heavens; and to blaspheme the name of God and his doctrine. For all these things they will have to give an account.

Their last state is worse than the first; as they are more under the power of the adversary. The unclean spirit, taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. This may be more easily perceived in reference to bodily possession; but for substance it is true in a case of spiritual possession. It has already been shown, that those who fall away from religion, are more guilty than they were before; and it is sin that gives Satan the dominion over the heart of man; consequently, the deeper men plunge into sin, the greater is the power which the enemy acquires over them. He then employs them more in his drudgery, and binds them with heavier chains.

Their last state is worse than the first; as they are more miserable in their own minds: because they have lost all the pleasures of religion, after they had known their value by experience. When Adam was driven out of paradise, he would feel far more disconsolate, than if he had never dwelt in that blissful region. So those who have lost the favour of God, the testimony of a good conscience, and the hope of glory, will feel more disquietude and dejection, than if they had never enjoyed these blessings. They may strive to slumber in forgetfulness, but whenever reflection takes place, which sooner or later it must do, they will be appalled at their dismal situation, and feel the sharpest stings of a guilty conscience.

Their last state is worse than the first; because they have less prospect of deliverance. As they are brought into thralldom again, there is less ground to hope for another release; for they are more under the dominion of the wicked one; they are further from God by wicked works; they are at a greater

distance from the way to the kingdom of heaven. They have quenched the Spirit, and done despite to his grace; their hearts are less susceptible of divine impressions, and less moved by either the terrors of the law, or the promises of the gospel. They have approached much nearer to that awful state, in which men are abandoned of heaven, and given up to the hardness of their own hearts, to be filled with the fruit of their own ways. Then there will remain no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. All who have fallen away, are on the verge of this dreadful condition.

Their last state is worse than the first; because a more severe doom awaits them in the world to come. As their sins are attended with greater aggravations, they are involved in greater condemnation; and they heap up more wrath against the day of wrath; when the greatest degree of punishment will be awarded, to those who have trodden underfoot the Son of God. Therefore the last state of that man is worse than the first: more extensively and more awfully so, than any language can express, or any human mind conceive.

The parable thus understood, applies to people in various states. It applies to those who never experienced the power of godliness. It shows their hearts are under the dominion of the wicked one; instead of being temples for the living God, they are inhabited by an unclean spirit. If they continue in this state, they will at last be doomed to that misery, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. But Christ is able and willing to save them: his gospel proclaims liberty to the captive; and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. But before this deliverance can be obtained, men are brought to feel their need of it; to know so much of the plague of their own hearts, as to be convinced they are earthly, sensual, and devilish. On this account they abhor themselves,

and repent in dust and ashes: and to such our Saviour says, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The parable applies to those who are in a state of grace; who experience and practice vital godliness. It shows what great things God has done for them; and teaches them to take heed lest they fall. The enemy that has been expelled, will endeavour to regain his former habitation. Be not ignorant of Satan's devices; with the strictest caution, guard every avenue to the heart. Abstain from the appearance of evil; flee from those things that war against the soul; look to the strong for strength; take unto you the whole armour of God; praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance; and then you will be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.

The parable applies to such as once possessed true religion, but have fallen away. It shows that the last state of such is worse than the first: but this is, that they may remember from whence they are fallen; that they may repent and do their first works; and if they come again before the Lord, with contrite hearts, they will experience his compassion and forgiveness. This appears by his conduct towards his people of old: when they were backsliding from him, he says, How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together. I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself—therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord. This is recorded for the encouragement of all who are grieved at heart, for having grieved God by falling away. Let the prodigal return to his father's house, and he will meet with a gracious reception; the promise to such is, I will heal thy backsliding, and love thee freely.

SERMON XIV.

“THE blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven.” —
MATT. xii. 31.

THE Almighty exerciseth both justice and mercy in his moral government; and this is highly requisite; without justice there would be no check to the commission of crimes; and without mercy he would be a consuming fire, and no flesh could be saved. It is needful for both these attributes to be kept in remembrance; if men only contemplate divine justice, they can have no hope of salvation; and if they look at divine mercy alone, they may deceive their own souls, and cry peace to themselves, when sudden destruction is coming upon them; and people in general are more prone to presumption, than to despair. The idea of an Almighty Being, who has no bowels of compassion, is so appalling, that it is seldom entertained by the human mind; but the notion that God is all mercy and forbearance, is so agreeable to the heart of man, that it finds a ready admittance, and a cordial entertainment. And when this notion is received, there is no fear of future punishment; and the reins are given to the passions and appetites. To prevent this fatal delusion, the scriptures show, that mercy can only be exercised in unison with justice; consequently there are cases, to which mercy will not be extended: one of these cases is stated in the words before us. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall not be forgiven. When a man cannot be forgiven, he cannot be saved; he cannot escape

eternal perdition. Then how highly requisite it is to know, what sin can be forgiven, and what remains unpardonable? The unpardonable sin is here expressed by terms which are free from ambiguity; they are clear and definite in their signification.

By the Holy Ghost, is to be understood, the third person in the adorable Trinity; whose aid is indispensable in the work of human redemption. To blaspheme, is to slander, defame, and revile. It might therefore appear, that any person of ordinary capacity, might certainly know what it is to blaspheme the Holy Ghost, which constitutes the unpardonable sin. But when it is considered by whom this crime has been committed, how it differs in atrocity from blasphemy against Christ, and what renders it unpardonable, there are many intricacies, which may entangle and bewilder the mind, and leave it involved in some uncertainty; for it is hard to be understood. Many solutions of the difficulty have been proposed, which when examined, prove unsatisfactory. Some divines resolve the sin against the Holy Ghost, into final impenitence and unbelief, as the reason why it cannot be forgiven; but in this respect it does not differ from other sins, because no wilful transgression can be pardoned, unless it be followed by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: as it is written, *Except ye repent, ye shall all perish. He that believeth not shall be damned.* The sin against the Holy Ghost, if it is to be understood, must have a distinct character of its own, it must be distinguished from all other sins which may be forgiven; such a distinction it has at the time it is committed.

Some maintain that the unpardonable sin here spoken of, is wilful and malicious opposition to the gospel, by those who know it to be the truth: so that they sin with light in the mind, and malice in the heart. This indeed is a sin of dreadful aggra-

vation ; a transgression that is grown up to heaven, which indisputably deserves God's wrath and indignation ; and which loudly calls for signal vengeance. Yet great as this sin is, it does not appear to be excluded from the possibility of forgiveness. No people were ever more clearly convicted of such iniquity, than the Jews were, during our Saviour's ministry. They saw the truth of his doctrine fully confirmed by his mighty works ; so they must have known that he was a teacher come from God, for no man could do the miracles which he did, except God was with him. Therefore, when they rejected him with contempt, they sinned with light in their minds ; and the malice of their hearts was manifest, by the calumnies they heaped upon him, and when by their wicked hands he was crucified and slain. Yet he declared that all manner of sin and blasphemy against the Son of Man might be forgiven. Consequently, light in the mind and malice in the heart, do not in many cases, make sin unpardonable ; and of course do not constitute a definition of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Some contend, that the sin in question, is apostacy from the Christian religion ; when men so far fall away as to deny the Lord that bought them, and plunge again into the pollutions of the world. Those who hold this opinion, suppose, that St. Paul describes the sin against the Holy Ghost as follows : It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. But this passage throws no light on the sin against the Holy Ghost, for it is equally difficult to comprehend. When St. Paul declares, respecting those

that have fallen away, that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, it is undecided, whether he is to be understood absolutely or comparatively; whether by impossible, he means what cannot by any means take place; or only what is attended with extreme difficulty and danger. The latter sense of his words, agrees best with other parts of scripture, and with all ecclesiastical records. Those who fall away are exhorted to repent, and do their first works; and that is in order to their forgiveness; and great numbers of such have been reclaimed. Many after they had abjured the Christian faith, and openly vilified Christ, and relapsed into gross idolatry, have repented and obtained forgiveness; and have afterwards died martyrs in the cause of Christ. So that apostacy from God, however heinous a sin it may be, is not beyond forgiveness: if it were so, what St. Paul says on the subject would not explain the sin against the Holy Ghost, for Paul speaks of those who fall away from the Christian religion, but our Saviour speaks of those who had never embraced it, who had remained in an unconverted state. Paul speaks of apostates who cannot be renewed again to repentance; but this does not apply to those wicked Jews, who never had repentance. The sin our Saviour spake of, was in some sense committed exclusively against the Holy Ghost, but that of which Paul speaks, was committed against Christ; for the aggravation of it was, that they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. Therefore what Paul says respecting apostacy, does not apply to what our Saviour terms, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

It may be more easy to tell what this sin is not, than what it is. Augustine, speaking of it says; 'The question, truly, is very difficult; neither is any more difficult in all the scriptures.' This seems to be confirmed by the great diversity of opinions,

which, on this subject, has prevailed in all ages ; and by the untenable positions on which many expositors take their stand. Yet there are some worthy commentators, who deny that there is any difficulty in understanding what the unpardonable sin is, and express their surprise, that so many sensible men have made a shift to mistake it. They likewise affirm, that there is not a plainer text in all the Bible ; for it evidently imports neither more nor less, than attributing the miracles of Christ to the devil ; which the Jews did when our Saviour declared their sin should not be forgiven. The Evangelist states, that there was brought unto Christ one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb : and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David ? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation. If Satan cast out Satan, how shall his kingdom stand ? Wherefore, I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven. According to St. Mark, these words were spoken by Christ, because they said he had an unclean spirit. From this, it is concluded to be clear beyond all doubt, that when the Jews attributed the miracles of Christ to the devil, they committed the unpardonable sin.

Yet, after all that has been advanced, by the advocates of this opinion, there remain insuperable difficulties to this exposition ; for when the Pharisees said, This fellow casteth out devils by Beelzebub, it was Christ himself that they blasphemed ; it was his character that was directly and expressly vilified : their words could convey no other idea to those who

heard them. When the people said, Is not this the son of David? by which was understood the Messiah, it kindled the malice and rancour of the Pharisees into a flame; and they proceeded to blast his reputation, by causing it to be believed, that he was an imposter, in league with Satan. If this was not blasphemy against Christ, he never was blasphemed at all. There is not a vestige of probability, that the Pharisees at that time, intended to vilify the Holy Ghost. And our Saviour not only heard their words, but knew their thoughts, and would no doubt judge of their criminality by their intentions. If the words they used may be so construed, as to imply a defamation of the Holy Spirit; yet, as such was not their intention, how can it be supposed, that this would constitute an unpardonable crime, when such intentional and malicious blasphemy against Christ himself might be forgiven? Much stress is laid on St. Mark's observation, that Christ thus spake, because they said he had an unclean Spirit; but the Evangelist might not mean that this was the sin against the Holy Ghost, but only, the occasion which called forth the admonition.

The drift of our Saviour's discourse gives no intimation, that the people he was addressing, were beyond the reach of divine mercy; it is quite the reverse. When he said the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men, it was no doubt a warning to them that they might not involve themselves in that condemnation; and the warning was the more seasonable, as they had by blaspheming Christ, approached so near to the sin which cannot be forgiven. But he was so far from intimating, that they had already committed an unpardonable sin, that he promised them another sign for their conviction, namely, his resurrection from the dead. He likewise promised to send the Holy Spirit to convince them of sin; and that was in order

to bring them to repentance, that they might be saved. When he hung on the cross, he said, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. After his resurrection, he sent them another offer of mercy, when he commanded repentance and remission of sins to be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. There Peter stood up and said, Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, by miracles, wonders and signs; ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. When they heard that, they were pierced to the heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said, Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. This promise was made to all, and it was gladly received by three thousand souls. These things show, that up to that period, the Jews had not committed the unpardonable sin.

It may then be asked, what was the sin against the Holy Ghost which could not be forgiven? This question, in our judgement, has been answered in the most able manner by Whitby; who has been followed by Doddridge and M'Knight, and other eminent divines. But to understand the sin against the Holy Ghost, it should be remembered, that there is a particular ministration of the Holy Spirit spoken of in scripture, which did not commence till after our Lord's resurrection; to this, the words of our Saviour refer, when he says to his disciples, If I go not away, the comforter will not come; but if I go away I will send him unto you. When he promised rivers of living water to his people, John says, This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because

that Jesus was not yet glorified. The Holy Spirit was indeed, in some measure given before, but not as it was afterwards : not in such an extraordinary manner as to form a distinct dispensation of grace. This dispensation of the Spirit, commenced at the day of Pentecost. At that time the apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. St. Peter told how this had come to pass, he says, This Jesus, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. To this dispensation of the Spirit our Saviour had reference, when he spake of the sin against the Holy Ghost : and his words, says Whitby, may be thus paraphrased ; ‘ You have represented me as a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and as one who casts out devils by Beelzebub ; and you will still go on, after all the miracles I have done among you, to represent me as a false prophet, and a deceiver of the people : nevertheless, all these grievous sins shall be forgiven you, if that last dispensation of the Holy Ghost, which I shall after my ascension send among you, shall prevail with you to believe in me : but if when I have sent the Holy Ghost to testify the truth of my mission, and of my resurrection, you shall continue in your unbelief, and shall blaspheme the Holy Ghost, and represent him also as an evil spirit, your sin shall never be forgiven ; nor shall any thing further be done to call you to repentance.’

By this it may be seen, that the unpardonable sin, was a malicious defamation of the Holy Spirit, under that dispensation of grace which succeeded our Saviour’s ascension. The question here is, Why was this sin unpardonable ? since the same defamation against Christ himself might be forgiven. Two reasons may be assigned for this. One reason is, that

blasphemy at the latter period, was a greater crime; because the truth was more clearly revealed, and more powerfully attested. During our Saviour's own ministry, there was some concealment of his dignity and intentions; of what he was in himself, and of the work he came to accomplish. When Peter, James, and John, came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they were commanded to tell the vision to no man, until Christ was risen from the dead. Until that great event took place, some obscurity hung over his mission. While every one wondered at the things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these things sink deep into your ears; for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying; it was hid from them, and they perceived it not. They had still some expectation that he would set up a temporal kingdom, and reasoned among themselves, which of them should be the greatest. If the apostles at that time, did not clearly understand the nature of the gospel kingdom, it is less to be wondered at, that the Jews did not clearly perceive it. They were prejudiced at the meanness of his birth, and low condition. They said is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then is it, that he saith, I came down from heaven? They could not believe that the carpenter's son, could be the Messiah, that was so magnificently described by the prophets. But the ground of their objections was removed, by his resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Then he was manifested to be the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. The apostles who bore testimony to his resurrection, said, We are his witnesses, so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him. The hand of the Lord was with the apostles, confirming their word, by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. These gifts of the Holy Ghost, glorified Christ; they convinced the world of sin,

because they believed not on Christ, and of righteousness, because he went to the Father. So that by the Spirit, the truth was the most clearly revealed, and the most powerfully confirmed; which made it a greater crime to resist the truth, when attended with such evidence. And this accounts for our Saviour declaring, that blasphemy against himself might be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost should not be forgiven.

Another reason why this sin could not be forgiven, was, because this new dispensation of the Spirit, was the last effort that heaven would make to save the Jewish nation. The Almighty said of the Jews, as he frequently might have done, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. Yet he was not willing to give them up; but sent them inspired prophets, in order to reclaim them. After they had killed the prophets, and stoned such as were sent unto them, other methods were taken to bring them to repentance. John the Baptist was raised up as an extraordinary messenger to warn them to flee from the wrath to come; he came in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the disobedient, unto the wisdom of the just. After John's ministry had passed away, and had in a great measure been unavailing, a much greater than John made his appearance; for God sent his own Son to redeem them from iniquity: but they were resolved that he should not reign over them; they vilified his character, and put him to a cruel and ignominious death. Yet even after this they were not utterly cast off and forsaken; the door of mercy was left open; something further was done to induce them to repent and believe the gospel. This prediction was fulfilled, And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; I will show wonders in heaven above, and

signs in the earth beneath. The gospel was then preached to the Jews, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The apostles in the demonstration of the Spirit, testified that God had raised up his Son Jesus, in order to bless them, by turning them from their iniquities. They testified that Christ was exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the remission of sins: and they exclaimed, Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. But this was the last expedient that Heaven employed to save that people; and the malignity of their hearts rendered it ineffectual.—In the synagogue at Antioch, Paul declared, that Christ was raised from the dead, and said, through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him, all that believe are justified. But the Jews were filled with envy, and spake against these things, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing that you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the gentiles; for so hath the Lord commanded us. In the synagogue at Corinth, Paul being zealously affected in spirit, testified to the Jews, that Jesus is the Christ: and when they opposed and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; from henceforth I will go unto the gentiles. By these instances it appears, that the Jews were guilty of blaspheming the Holy Ghost: and that this filled up the measure of their iniquity. They were then given up to the hardness of their hearts, and abandoned of heaven; they were cut off from being God's church and people; and left under sin that could not be forgiven unto men. Thus we see what constituted the unpardonable crime.

It has been frequently inquired, whether the sin against the Holy Ghost can be committed at the present day? That sin was a malicious opposition to the truth, attested by miracles wrought under the extraordinary outpourings of the Holy Spirit: and under such circumstances only, could the unpardonable sin be committed: and there is no person in the present day placed in such circumstances; of course they cannot now commit that sin which our Saviour declared should not be forgiven. They may take to themselves the former words of Christ, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: that is, provided they repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Come and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. For with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption. Many, whose iniquities were more in number than the hairs of their head, and whose transgressions were grown up to heaven, have been washed, sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

The idea of a sin committed, which cannot be forgiven, is one of the most awful thoughts which can enter the mind of man: for a person who has been guilty of an unpardonable crime, is in a hopeless state: his probation is ended, his doom is fixed, he cannot escape the damnation of hell. And it is to be remembered, that all sin would have been unpardonable, if Christ had not given himself a ransom for sinners. Without the shedding of his blood there could have been no remission of sin. There could have been no removal of guilt and condemnation; if he had not put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. As all have sinned, all must have perished, if he had not borne their iniquities in his body on the tree. What obligations, therefore, has he laid on mankind,

by his cross and passion, his agony and bloody sweat! This induced the apostle to say, If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha; intimating thereby, that such will perish inevitably, and deservedly; and will lie under the burden of aggravated guilt for ever and ever.

Some people make themselves miserable, by entertaining groundless fears of having committed the unpardonable sin; so that they live in gloomy despondency, or deep despair. It is very desirable that persons in this state of mind, should be relieved from their overwhelming anguish and distress, by being persuaded that such a sin cannot be committed at the present day; and that for all their sins forgiveness may be obtained. But there is another state of mind more commonly met with, attended with worse symptoms, and more fatal consequences. Many are so far from having any fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin, that they go to the other extreme; they are not afraid of committing sin that may never be pardoned; all sin may become unpardonable, and will certainly do so, if not repented of and forsaken. If any person had already been guilty of a crime that could never be forgiven, neither in this world nor that which is to come; no language could describe the horrors of his situation. Yet into this bottomless abyss of misery, all plunge themselves who die in their iniquity; for then, all the sins which they ever committed are unpardonable. So they have nothing before them but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish; a state from which there is no redemption. There is no repentance in the grave; nor pardon offered to the dead. The unrighteous must be unrighteous still, for he that made them will not have mercy upon them; and he that formed them will show them no favour. For such there remains no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain, fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. How

dangerous therefore, it is to live in sin ; for such may be cut off with a stroke ; and then a great ransom cannot deliver them.

If you have any desire to be saved, any care for your immortal souls, make it your first and great concern, to obtain the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins ; which is a privilege revealed by the gospel, and offered to all the sons and daughters of men. Seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given, knock and the door shall be opened. Do this before it is too late ; seek the Lord while he may be found ; call upon him while he is near. Let this be done without delay ; even at this moment. Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

The scriptures point out the awful effects of sin, for the purpose of our admonition. David says, The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether ; moreover by them is thy servant warned. They give warning that sin separates the soul from God, and leads to perdition. And even the servants of God themselves, have need of warning. On this account the apostle says to believers, Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is so hardening and deceitful, that many who had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Christ, are again entangled therein, and the last state of them is worse than the first. Therefore be not high-minded but fear ; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Be mindful of your own weakness, and place your dependence on the grace of God. Say with the Psalmist, Who can understand his errors ? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; Let them not have dominion over me ; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

SERMON XV.

"**THERE** was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

WHEN the apostle spake these words he was greatly afflicted; and no affliction for the present is joyous but grievous; and when thus tried and tempted, if believers are not watchful, they may give way to impatience, and be induced to doubt of their acceptance with God; which would deeply injure themselves, and dishonour their holy profession. To prevent this, it is written, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. By this it appears, that afflictions are no marks of God's displeasure; and they are to be received with reverence and resignation, as they come from the hand of the Almighty.

That many are the afflictions of the righteous, is a declaration of scripture that has been verified in all ages. The Old Testament saints had trial of cruel mockings, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; and the primitive Christians endured a great fight of afflictions, while they were made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. And this was the case even with those who were the most eminent for their

gifts and graces. John, among the followers of Christ, was called the beloved disciple ; yet when he wrote to a persecuted and suffering Church, he had to style himself, their companion in tribulation. Paul, who is called, the great apostle, was involved in manifold afflictions : one of which he calls a thorn in the flesh : and he prayed to have it removed ; but the answer was, My grace is sufficient for thee.

What occasioned his affliction is previously stated : he says, I knew a man in Christ, caught up to the third heaven. This is to be understood of himself, because it is introduced to prove, that he was nothing behind the chiefest apostles ; and in consequence of the vision, he was in danger of being exalted by the abundance of revelation ; and to prevent this there was given him a thorn in the flesh. So that there can be no doubt he is to be understood as affirming, that he himself was caught up to the third heaven.

The inspired writers give the name of heaven, or heavens, to three different regions ; first to the atmosphere ; hence we read of the fowls of heaven ; and the clouds of heaven. A second region, called heaven, is that vast expanse in which the sun and moon and stars are fixed ; hence we read of the stars of heaven : and it is said the Almighty has made the heavens ; and by his Spirit has garnished the heavens. Another region called heaven, is the residence of the Deity, who sitteth in the heavens : and we are taught to say, Our Father who art in heaven. Christ came down from heaven ; and after his resurrection the heavens received him. This is the residence of the holy angels ; and likewise of glorified saints : and this is what the apostle calls the third heaven : by way of eminence, it may be called the heaven of heavens.

To this glorious region, St. Paul was caught up ; but whether in the body or out of the body, he says, I cannot tell. It might be either the one or the

other. The prophet Ezekiel, was by the Spirit lifted up between earth and heaven; but this was in the visions of God; it was a rapture of the mind. Philip, the Evangelist, was caught away from the Ethiopian, and was found at Azotus; this was a rapture of the body: in which of these ways Paul was taken up into heaven, he could not determine; either of them was within the limits of divine power; and either of them consistent with the doctrines of divine truth. The spirit can exist in a state of separation from the body, for when the dust shall return to the dust as it was, the spirit shall return to God who gave it; and the body can inhabit the realms of bliss; as appears by the cases of Enoch and Elijah. So that Paul might have been carried up into heaven, either in the body, or out of the body.

For what purpose he was taken up into heaven, we are not expressly informed. We may presume it was not to be better acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, he was called to preach; because he had the Spirit to guide him into all truth; and what he heard in heaven was unspeakable; it was not possible for human language to express: and therefore he could not communicate what he had heard. But he might hear so much of the happiness and glory of a future state, as would give him great encouragement during his conflicts in the present world. Our Saviour, at a certain time, set before his disciples the doleful scene of his approaching sufferings and death; and the calamities they would have to endure when the shepherd would be smitten, and the sheep would be scattered, and be as sheep among wolves. What they were thus taught to expect, might have overwhelmed their hearts with trouble and dismay. But in a few days he taketh Peter, James, and John, into a high mountain, and was transfigured before them; his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. Moses

and Elias appeared talking with him : a bright cloud overshadowed them ; and a voice out of the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him. This extraordinary attestation of divine truth, this visible display of the Saviour's glory, this glimpse of heaven, was no doubt intended to encourage these disciples, under all their future dangers and hardships. And it is reasonable to conclude, that for the same purpose, St. Paul was caught up to heaven. By what he would learn of the certainty and happiness of being with Christ, his faith would be confirmed ; and his hope enlivened, that he would be able to bear his complicated afflictions, and to say, for this cause we faint not, for though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day : for we reckon that the sufferings of this life, are not worthy to be compared with that glory that shall be revealed in us.

After this he says, Lest I should be exalted above measure, by the abundance of revelation, there was given me a thorn in the flesh. He was afflicted to prevent his being high-minded. This is one expedient the Almighty employs to hide pride from man, and keep back his soul from the pit. This vice is dangerous and destructive to the soul ; for pride goeth before destruction ; and a haughty spirit before a fall. Yet men are so strongly addicted to this vice, that they sometimes grow proud of spiritual gifts, and heavenly favours. A teacher among the Corinthians, who possessed miraculous gifts, grew proud of his endowments : hence Paul admonished him that he might not be puffed up ; and said, Who maketh thee to differ ? What hast thou which thou didst not receive ? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory ? Paul likewise charged Timothy, not to confer the office of a bishop on a novice, lest he should be lifted up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil. And as pride can grow

from spiritual gifts, it might have been produced by Paul's visions and revelations. He had been caught up to the third heaven, where he heard celestial language, that could not be uttered on earth ; where he probably mingled with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven ; and saw the ineffable glory of the Divine Being. This was a favour that was not granted to any other of the apostles ; to them the Lord spake on earth, but to Paul in heaven. And being so highly distinguished above all other mortals, he might have been led to think more highly of himself than he ought to think : by which means he might have fallen from grace ; so that after he had preached to others, he might himself have become a cast-away. But in order to his preservation, there was given him a thorn in the flesh.

The term, thorn, is used in scripture for any thing distressing or vexatious : it was said to the Jews, when they came to Canaan, If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you ; those which remain shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides ; and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. What particular affliction Paul speaks of is not certain ; but as he says it was in his flesh, it is reasonable to understand it of some bodily infirmity. Yet it does not appear to have deprived him of general health and vigour, for he was in labours more abundant, than even the other apostles. Commentators, both ancient and modern, have stated what they conceived to be Paul's thorn in the flesh ; but no conjecture seems so natural as that of Dr. Whitby, who supposes that the view which Paul had of heavenly glory, produced some paralytic symptoms ; which affected his organs of speech ; so that he had not a good utterance, and it might be attended with some degree of distortion of countenance. As this might lessen both his acceptance and his usefulness, he would feel it as a heavy calamity.

Moses alleged as a reason why he should not be sent to Pharoah, that he was slow of speech, and had a stammering tongue. And if Paul had a defective utterance it would disparage him in public assemblies: and when he went among the Corinthians, where eloquence was so much admired, he might well say, that he was with them in much weakness, in fear, and trembling. That he was defective in speech, may be gathered from several passages. His adversaries said, His letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible. This, indeed, may be exaggerated, yet there seems to be some foundation for it, because such a distinction is made between his writings and his discourse; had these persons been only influenced by prejudice or ill will, they would have censured his letters, as much as his speech. He seems himself to intimate that he had some defect as a public speaker; when writing to the Galatians, he says, Brethren, you know how through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the gospel unto you; and my temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not; but received me as an angel of God. Here he gives it as an instance of their kindness, that they had not despised his ministry, on account of his infirmity. But what could that infirmity be? His labours show that it could be no want of bodily strength; it never appears in any of his ministerial duties, except preaching. And as to his preaching, as far as we can judge, by what is recorded, he used as good language, and discovered as much knowledge, and inculcated as sound doctrine, as he did in his writings: and in no ministerial endowment, was he excelled by any other apostle, except in utterance. So that some defect in his speech must have been the infirmity with which he preached the gospel: and this, in all probability, was his thorn in the flesh.

And he says, as it might be rendered, that this was

given him that the messenger of Satan might buffet him. By a messenger of Satan, he may be understood of one of the false teachers among the Corinthians, for he had before termed these teachers ministers of Satan. And the person alluded to, had probably taken occasion, from Paul's infirmity in speaking, to hold him up to ridicule and contempt; in order that he might be despised by the people.

If it could not be determined what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, yet it would be certain that it was some distressing affliction; and in this respect, all the followers of Christ may expect to have a thorn in the flesh; something that will give them vexation, and try all the faith and patience of which they are possessed. This is confirmed by all Christian experience. And as every heart knows its own bitterness, every one should know from whence it comes. Affliction does not spring from the ground, nor trouble from the dust; for there is a divine providence that governs the world; and this consideration should teach those who are in trying circumstances, to say, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. But as Paul says he was buffeted by a messenger of Satan, some may think he attributes his calamity to that evil being, or one of his agents. But if this had been what he meant to say, it would not have altered the case at all; because if Satan, or one of his messengers, had inflicted this calamity, it must have been by the permission of God, who would not have permitted it, but for some wise purpose. Job was afflicted both by Satan and by wicked men, yet he viewed these, only as second causes, and subordinate instruments, who were doing the will of the Almighty. Hence he said, The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

It is not only requisite to know from whence afflictions come, it should likewise be known, for what purpose they come. Paul knew that there was given

him a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure with the transcendancy of his revelations. It is true, that every one cannot be expected to know so particularly, why he is afflicted ; but he may know in general, that his trials are sent to make him more holy on earth, that he may be happier in heaven. Therefore blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.

Paul's affliction was not sent because he was exalted above measure, but lest he should be so. In like manner, the trials of God's people, may not in general be sent as chastisements of faults they have committed, but in order to prevent them from falling into some snare of the wicked one ; and in this case, a preventive is better than a cure.

When Paul had a thorn in the flesh, he says, I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me ; and he said, My grace is sufficient for thee.— This gracious promise was obtained in answer to prayer. In this way only is divine aid to be obtained. Though the Almighty knows what his people need, before they speak, yet he says, For these things I will be inquired of, that I may do them for you. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Therefore, let all your requests be made known unto God by prayer and supplication. Prayer prepares the heart to receive the divine blessing ; it gives a title to the promises of the gospel ; and the Almighty is pleased to make it the channel of his grace and Spirit. The greatest encouragement to prayer is, that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ; who also maketh intercession for us. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This prayer of Paul was addressed to Christ. So was that of dying Stephen, when he kneeled down, and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. The primitive Christians were so much in the practice of praying to Christ, that they were denominated, Those who in every place call on the Lord Jesus. He is a proper object of prayer, for he has all power in heaven and in earth. To pray to any of the saints or angels in heaven is idolatry ; but it is the will of God that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father. Those who will not pray to Christ, reject him as a Saviour ; and say in effect, We will not have this man to reign over us.

The prayer of the apostle, which obtained the promise, was three times repeated. He says, For this thing I besought the Lord thrice. Some understand him to mean, that he did it often ; but it is certain, that for the same blessing, he did not pray less than three times. Our Saviour, at the approach of his sufferings on the cross, prayed the third time, saying, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me : and in this respect he has set his followers an example, that they should follow his steps. If Paul had prayed only once or twice, he would not have obtained the promise ; and if this had not been obtained the third time, we may presume that he would have continued his supplications. For this is what he charges others to do ; he says, Continuing instant in prayer : and the meaning is, persevere in prayer. For the exercise of faith and patience, or to call forth more earnest desires, or for reasons unknown to us, the answer to prayer may be delayed ; but those who would obtain the blessing, are to pray without ceasing ; for Christ spake a parable that men ought always to pray and not to faint.

The answer to prayer which the apostle obtained, was not what he had asked for. He had requested his affliction to be removed, but the answer received,

implied that the affliction was to remain; but that he was to be supported under it. This may teach, that the prayers of God's people may not be answered as their own wishes may dictate. In this respect, the infinitely wise God, may in mercy deny their requests. This is more especially the case, when they pray for any temporal blessing. It is indeed affirmed, that no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly: but he alone knows what is good for them. And it was then good for Paul to be afflicted. Hence in prayer there is to be an entire submission to the divine will. Our Saviour in prayer said, Not my will but thine be done. And he taught his followers to say, in prayer, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

The answer to prayer which the apostle obtained was, My grace is sufficient for thee.—Grace, often denotes favour or kindness: but some contend that it never signifies any thing else: but what would mere favour do for a person in distress, if no assistance was afforded? To say to the destitute, be thou warmed, or be thou filled, what doth it profit? What would mere favour have done for the apostle, under his affliction? Where there is both kindness and ability, assistance will be given; and the ability of Christ, is as great as his kindness, for it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell. Therefore the grace promised, was the aid of his Holy Spirit. The apostle says, I laboured—yet, not I, but the grace of God that was in me. He does not here speak of mere kindness towards him, but of a divine and supernatural influence within him. This is the grace here promised; and this grace is sufficient for the people of God, under all circumstances. It is sufficient to support them under all their trials; so that when they pass through deep waters, the waves shall not overflow them; and when they pass through the fire, the flame shall not kindle upon them. This

grace is sufficient to give them the victory in all their conflicts: so that they are able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. This grace is sufficient to comfort them, in all their tribulations: so that though the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and the fields should yield no meat, yet they will rejoice in the Lord: they will joy in the God of their salvation. This grace is sufficient to keep them from falling, and at last to present them faultless before the presence of the Lord.

To this promise of grace is added, My strength is made perfect in weakness. This may denote, that it does not depend on any human ability previously possessed. Natural productions require a suitable soil, to make them grow and flourish: but divine grace will take root, and bring forth fruit, in the most barren places. Human weakness neither prevents the reception, nor the growth of grace. Those who are nothing but weakness in themselves, may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: for he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. In this sense, strength is made perfect in weakness. This may be spoken likewise, in reference to the great attainments of believers, who hold on their way, and in the Lord grow stronger and stronger. Though in their flesh dwelleth no good thing, yet they grow up into Christ their living head in all things. They arrive at the fulness of the stature of a man in Christ. They are filled with all the fulness of God: and they will at last be presented perfect in Christ: and in their full and final salvation, it will be manifest, that divine strength has been perfected in human weakness.

When the apostle received this promise, he said, Most gladly will I rather glory in mine infirmities. He was now willing to bear that painful affliction which he calls a thorn in the flesh, and any other that might fall upon him in the course of his ministry.

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To this promise of grace is added, My strength is made perfect in weakness. This may denote, that it does not depend on any human ability previously possessed. Natural productions require a suitable soil, to make them grow and flourish: but divine grace will take root, and bring forth fruit, in the most barren places. Human weakness neither prevents the reception, nor the growth of grace. Those who are nothing but weakness in themselves, may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: for he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. In this sense, strength is made perfect in weakness. This may be spoken likewise, in reference to the great attainments of believers, who hold on their way, and in the Lord grow stronger and stronger. Though in their flesh dwelleth no good thing, yet they grow up into Christ their living head in all things. They arrive at the fulness of the stature of a man in Christ. They are filled with all the fulness of God: and they will at last be presented perfect in Christ: and in their full and final salvation, it will be manifest, that divine strength has been perfected in human weakness.

When the apostle received this promise, he said, Most gladly will I rather glory in mine infirmities. He was now willing to bear that painful affliction which he calls a thorn in the flesh, and any other that might fall upon him in the course of his ministry.

And he was resolved to bear them in a way that would bring most honour to Christ. There are various ways of bearing affliction, which may all in some degree be commendable; yet they may differ in excellence, as one star differeth from another star in glory. One way of bearing affliction is, to do it with silent submission, without uttering one murmuring word. Thus David, when visited with calamity, says to the Almighty, I was silent because thou didst it. Another way of bearing affliction, is to mingle thankfulness with resignation. Believers may be so fully persuaded, that the Lord does all things well, that all things work together for good to them that love God, that they may be thankful for their chastisements; and thus in every thing give thanks, which is the will of God concerning them. But a still more noble way of bearing affliction, is to do it with joy and triumph. Of this our Saviour speaks, where he says to his disciples, When men shall hate and persecute you, then rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. In this manner the apostle was resolved to bear his trials; he would glory in tribulation; and count it all joy, when he fell into divers temptations. In this manner he would glory in his infirmities; not boast of them, but rejoice and be glad in the midst of his trials; knowing that his strength would be according to his day, and that his light affliction, would work out for him, a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.

To this he adds, That the power of Christ may rest upon me. Sometimes the apostle speaks elliptically, and it requires the addition of a word or two to make out the sense. In this place, he might mean, that he would bear his trials most gladly, provided the power of Christ should abide with him. He lived in dependance on Christ; he could do nothing of himself, but all things through Christ strengthening him. Or he may be understood to say, that he would

bear his trials in the manner specified, in order that the power of Christ might continue with him; intimating, that grace must be used in order to its preservation. From those who receive it in vain, it is taken away; but those who use grace, will have grace, and they will have it more abundantly. When the apostle speaks of the power of Christ resting upon him, he uses a word which signifies to cover over as with a tent or tabernacle; that is, so as to protect and keep safe. David considered himself to be overshadowed by divine power, for he says, He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion. Because thou hast made the Most High thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee. So the apostle speaks of being under the shadow of Christ, which would cause him to dwell in safety; for Christ is an hiding place from the storm; and a covert from the wind. Under such protection, he could trust and not be afraid, and say, I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded, that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him, against that day. An earthly tabernacle is easily broken down; but such a one as the apostle speaks of, constituted of divine power, is invincible. If God be for us, who can be against us?

Be ye followers of Paul, as he was of Christ: the apostle was a man of like passions with yourselves, subject to the same weaknesses and temptations; but by trusting in Christ, and living in union with him, he was preserved through all his dangers and distresses; and at last could exclaim, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me, a crown of righteousness. And such as imitate his life, will die with the same lively hopes, and glorious prospects.

From the words before us, and indeed from the

whole tenor of divine truth, it appears that the people of God are to have their trials and conflicts in the present life. But their encouragement is, that divine grace is sufficient for them. Its sufficiency has been evinced in all ages, and under all circumstances. The Patriarchs found it sufficient, when they lived as strangers and pilgrims in the world; making it manifest, that they desired a better country, that is a heavenly one. Moses found this grace sufficient, when he ventured on all the hardships of the wilderness; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season: for he had respect to the recompense of reward. Daniel found this grace sufficient, when he was cast into a den of lions; and so did the three Hebrews, in the midst of the fiery furnace; and so did many others, who were tortured, not accepting of deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. The apostles found this grace sufficient, so that when bonds and imprisonments awaited them in every city, none of these things moved them, neither did they count their lives dear unto them, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry they had received of the Lord Jesus. Multitudes have found this grace sufficient at the martyr's stake; for they have been brought out of great tribulation; and are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.

Do not rest without the possession of this grace. Seek, and ye shall find; ask, and it shall be given. Pray that you may be strengthened by the Spirit's might in the inner man with patience, unto long-suffering with joyfulness. Let patience have its perfect work upon you, that you may be entire, lacking nothing. Be strong in faith bringing glory to God; that when you are tried you may come forth as gold, and obtain the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This promise, My grace is sufficient for thee, relates to those who are in the favour of God ; but it is applicable to others, for the grace of Christ is free for all ; it abounds to the chief of sinners ; whoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely. Christ gave himself a ransom for all : and all such as feel their need of him, may come to him that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. To those who are sorry for their sins, his grace is sufficient to pardon their iniquities, to bind up the broken-hearted, to give liberty to the captive, and to open the prison to them that are bound. To such as feel the plague of their own hearts, his grace is sufficient to cleanse them from all impurity ; to give them a new heart, and renew a right spirit within them. To all who have a concern for their salvation his grace is sufficient ; for he is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God through him ; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. His grace is sufficient at the present moment ; come, for all things are now ready.

SERMON XVI.

“ WE all do fade as a leaf ; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”—ISAIAH, lxiv. 6.

THE Psalmist says, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days ; that I may know how frail I am. It might be supposed, that these things might be clearly and sufficiently understood, without supernatural assistance ; for common observation, and universal experience, teach, that man who is born of a woman, is but of few days, and full of

trouble : that he is subject to sickness and sorrow, pain and death. But though these things are manifest and indisputable, they are often absent from men's thoughts ; or not properly regarded. There is a strong reluctance in the human heart, to meditate seriously on these subjects ; and this reluctance can be overcome only by divine grace : to obtain which the Psalmist made supplication to God. It was not a mere speculative knowledge of mortality, which he desired ; but such a knowledge as would induce him to lay it to heart ; and make a suitable use thereof ; as where it is said, So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom : the wisdom of laying a foundation for the time to come ; which is to be wise unto salvation. And this is the wisdom that comes from above ; which all need, and all ought to pray for : and it is what the words before us are intended to teach, which are these—We all do fade as a leaf.

These words, in their primary signification, applied to the Jews during their dispersion and captivity. Those people had been compared to a vine brought out of Egypt, and planted in Canaan ; where it took root and filled the land. It sent out its boughs unto the sea ; and its branches unto the river. But this flourishing vine brought forth wild grapes ; and even grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah. This brought down the judgements of heaven, by which it was blasted, withered, and scattered to the winds. By an hostile and overwhelming force, the country was invaded and laid waste ; multitudes of people were cut off, and the remnant were scattered abroad ; they were dispersed like dried leaves before a mighty wind. And when the prophet contemplated this scene of desolation, and remembered that sin was the cause of it, he said, We all do fade as a leaf ; our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away.

These words, are likewise applicable to all who

dwell in this vale of mortality, and are descriptive of man's frail and perishing condition. In order to show how swiftly man passeth away, and how easily he is cut off from the land of the living, images taken from vegetation, are frequently employed in the sacred scriptures. It is said, man cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down. Men shall fall, as a leaf falleth from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree. They shall be cut down like the grass; and wither like the green herb. All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth: surely the people is grass. They are as grass which in the morning groweth up and flourisheth, and in the evening it is cut down and withered. As to man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth, but the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. In like manner, it is here said, we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.

Man may be said to fade as a leaf, because his fading indicates, his inevitable return to the ground from whence he was taken. It is one of the fixed laws of nature, that the faded leaf shall fall from the tree, and mingle with the dust. And it is equally certain, that man must close his eyes in death. The living know that they shall die. Whatever station a man may fill, or whatever course he may pursue, he must be brought down to the grave, and to the house appointed for all living. But this was not man's original destination; it is the result of his iniquity: by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all, for all have sinned. So that those who contemplate the ravages of death, and consider how many descend to the grave, may exclaim, Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

As man was doomed to death in consequence of his transgression, it follows, that if he had not sinned, he would not have been appointed to die. Yet his Creator could not have intended him always to remain an inhabitant of this lower world : for he was commanded to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ; and if none had been removed from the present world, it could not have sustained its inhabitants. So that man could not have been designed to live here always. But after he had sufficiently served his day and generation, he might have gone to future glory, without going through the gates of death ; as Enoch and Elijah were translated, without any dissolution of their earthly frame. But when the first man was arraigned at the bar of his offended Creator, the sentence passed upon him was, Dust thou art ; and unto dust shalt thou return. This doom was irrevocable ; no future obedience could get it reversed. Righteous Abel was the first that entered the invisible world through the gloomy mansions of death. And the door of death which was then opened, was left open to all succeeding ages : and so wide open, as to admit the whole human race ; for it is appointed for all men once to die, and after that the judgement. Whether men are high or low, rich or poor, they must inevitably pass through the gates of death. The monarch on the throne is no more exempt than the beggar on the dunghill. The greatest favourites of heaven can procure no exemption ; for, the fathers, where are they ? or the prophets, do they live for ever ? The wise man dies like the fool. It has been uniformly seen, that one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh ; and this state of things will continue to the end of time ; for death is the last enemy that shall be destroyed. It is computed upon an average, that in one day, eighty thousand human beings return to the dust. Yet the grave never says, it is enough. The work of death never stands still.

“How many to their endless home,

This solemn moment fly?

And we are to the margin come,

And we expect to die.”

For we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

It may be observed that a faded leaf falls, to rise no more to its former state and situation. Job says, There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock die in the ground; yet through moisture it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But there is no hope of revival in the case of a fallen leaf. It can never be brought to life again; no power in nature can restore it to what it was before. In this respect, it is an emblem of man; when he descends to the grave, he goes hence to be no more seen. If a man die shall he live again? Not in the present world; for he is gone to his long home, “from whose bourne no traveller returns.”

As a flood deceaseth and drieth up, so man lieth down, and riseth not. He shall not awake, nor be raised out of his sleep, till the heavens be no more. As far as it relates to the present world, death is the last end of man. He is removed from all his earthly possessions; he is separated from his family, his friends, and connexions; he is cut off from all his worldly pursuits and enterprises; and can no more take any part in what is done under the sun. His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not. For as a cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so man that goeth down to the grave, shall come up no more: he shall return no more to his house, nor shall his place know him any more. In this respect we all do fade as a leaf.

Man, may be said to fade as a leaf, in reference to that gradual decay of his earthly frame, which na-

turally precedes his dissolution. Leaves are seen to fade a considerable time before they fall from off the tree; when the course of nature is not interrupted. It is true that in their most verdant state, they may be torn away; they may be cropt by the browsing herd; they may be blasted by lightning, or broken off by a violent wind. So it is with human nature; though men naturally fade before they fall, yet they may be brought down to the grave, before there is any decay of nature. Great multitudes, in the most vigorous periods of life, have been swept away by contagious distempers; by pestilence, famine, and earthquakes; and by the devouring sword; and by numerous other disasters, men may be deprived of life, before the eye has become dim, or the natural strength is abated. But in these cases, death is considered to be premature, it is an exception to the general rule; a deviation from the established laws of nature: for in the ordinary and natural course, men fade like a leaf, before they fall by the stroke of death. When men have attained to a state of maturity, they begin to descend: it may be by a slow gradation, imperceptible for some time, especially to themselves: but as age advances, natural vigour recedes; and they feel increasing pains, weakness, and langour. There may be dimness of sight, and dullness of hearing; the apprehension is not so quick as formerly; nor the memory so retentive; the stock of animal spirits may be diminished, and vivacity may be decreased; so that aged persons cannot have the same enjoyment of life, which they formerly possessed. When Barzillai, was invited by David to Jerusalem, where he would have met with courtly entertainment, he replied, I am this day four-score years old; Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men, or singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be a burden to my Lord the King? Such a

state of imbecility, may be expected by those who arrive at that period of life; and long before that time, decay seizes the frame, and lays every faculty under contribution; for we all do fade as a leaf.

In that decay of nature, which precedes man's dissolution, the Almighty mingles mercy with judgment; for by this means, all earthly attachments are loosed by degrees; which causes the stroke of death to be less appalling and painful. The previous decay of nature, makes death less distressing to surviving friends. When the first-born in Egypt, were cut off in one night, there was a great cry throughout the land: so if people were always taken away in their full vigour, and while they possessed all their capabilities for life, it would much increase the consternation. The previous decay of nature, which men experience, is a call to remember their latter end. It says in effect, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. The time of departure is approaching, therefore prepare to meet thy God.

As weakness and infirmity, are sure to accompany the decline of life, people should learn to devote their unimpaired faculties, to the service of God, and the work of their own salvation. To those who are in the morning of life, it is said, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. On these accounts it may be seen, that it is a merciful provision of Providence, for man to fade as a leaf.

It may be further observed, that there is a great diversity in the form and comeliness of leaves; some appear in the richest verdure; and some are adorned with the most brilliant colours, so that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them: but when they are faded and fallen to the ground, their beauty is defaced, their splendour has disappeared:

such as had been most exquisitely beautiful, have then no superiority over the rest: the most skilful botanist could not discover the remains of any one tint, for which they had been so much admired. In this respect man fades like a leaf, as they ultimately lose all earthly distinctions. For a time they may flourish like a flower of the field. Some flourish in the bloom and gaiety of youth; others in the vigour and activity of manhood: some flourish in the possession of great talents and accomplishments, bold achievements, and mighty deeds; others in wealth and honour, high rank and station, splendid titles, and all the pomp of high life. But all this splendour will fade and disappear. St. Peter says, All the glory of man is as the flower of the grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. Though the flower is more splendid than the grass, it is not more durable; it is destined to wither in as short a time. Some of what may be called the flowers of human nature, fade in the decline of life; and all the rest will be blasted in the valley and shadow of death. The distinctions which obtain among mankind, do not descend to the tomb; there all ranks and conditions are confounded. Every trace of high birth or elevated station, of youth, or strength, or beauty, will be obliterated. The countenance which had been most admired, will be ghastly; the head which had lodged most sciences, will be empty; and the tongue which had spoken most eloquently, will be silent; and the blood which had flowed in the noblest veins, will be meat for worms; and all the remains of human grandeur, will be a heap of dust, or a mass of putrefaction.

Earthly distinctions will have no existence in a future state; those who are most surrounded with earthly glory may say, Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I return: for men will not stand before God as high or low, rich or poor, learned or

unlearned ; but in the simplicity of their moral character. The hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall come forth ; they that have done good to the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation. Men will be only followed by their works ; they will be stripped of all earthly distinctions : in this respect, we all do fade as a leaf.

It may be further observed, that a leaf soon fades. Some parts, even of the vegetable kingdom, are of long duration ; there are trees which grow and flourish during several centuries ; but the leaves which put forth in Spring, fade and fall the next Autumn : and in reference to this short duration, man fades like a leaf. For what is life, but a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away ? Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth ? and is not the number of his days soon completed ? The days of our years are three score years and ten ; and if by reason of strength they be four score years, yet is their strength, labour, and sorrow : for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. This term of years is all that men can reasonably expect ; and it much exceeds what the greater number of people ever attain, for it is more than double the average of human life : and even those who attain to this age, or in some measure exceed it, may have occasion to say like old Jacob, Few and evil, have the days of the years of my life been. The Psalmist says, Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee : verily, every man at his best estate is altogether vanity. An handbreadth was probably the shortest measure then in use ; and how short is human life, if compared with those vast concerns in which man has to engage ; or with the extensive range of the human intellect ; or with those boundless desires which nature has planted in the heart of man, and which nothing can

satisfy but immortality ! So that the term of life can only be called an handbreadth. But when it is compared with the great Father of eternity, all measurement must be abandoned ; hence the Psalmist says, My age is as nothing before thee : Man at his best estate is altogether vanity. He is a compound of what is mortal and mutable, of what is unsubstantial and fugitive ; he is in a transitory state, and in a perishing condition. For we all do fade as a leaf.

Thus it will be seen, that the words under consideration, teach human frailty, the short duration, and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly acquisitions. But what is the drift of this doctrine ? What useful purpose can it serve ? The design of it is, to induce men not to look at the things which are temporal, but at those things which are eternal ; to forsake their broken cisterns, and come to the fountain of life and felicity, where they may draw water with joy from the wells of salvation.

Man, it is to be remembered, possesses an imperishable substance, for which he may obtain a satisfactory and durable portion ; and to do this, is the great business of human life. There is a spirit in man, that will survive the dissolution of his earthly frame. When the Almighty formed man out of the dust, he breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. This soul or spirit can possess all its faculties, energies, and enjoyments, after this life ; for when the dust shall return to the dust as it was, the spirit will return to God who gave it. St. Paul says, to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. This is no doubt spoken exclusively of the spirit, which at the moment of death, entered the realms of bliss. The soul of man is immortal, and therefore not subject to dissolution : and it is the declared will of its Creator that it shall always exist. Its powers are

incorruptible, it will suffer no decay; throughout endless ages it will 'flourish in immortal youth.' By this immortal spirit, man is distinguished from the beasts that perish; he is placed in a rank near to that of angels; he is crowned with glory and honour, and made the lord of this lower world. The value of the soul exceeds all computation, and nothing could compensate for its loss. What would it profit a man, if he should gain all the world, and lose his own soul? Though the soul is endowed with immortality, yet it may be lost; that is, it may lose all that can render existence desirable: it may lose its felicity, and be involved in endless punishment: so that it had been better for that man had he never been born.

It is therefore the great concern of mankind to endeavour to promote the welfare of their own souls: this cannot be done by minding earthly things, for they are too gross in their nature to satisfy an immortal spirit; if they were not so, they are too short in their duration, they perish with the using, and they will have no existence in a future state. What is it then that will promote the present and everlasting welfare of the soul?

This great end of man's existence will be secured by union with God. And he promises this blessing to those who love him. He says, I will dwell in you; I will be your God, and ye shall be my people. He is the Father of Lights, from whom descends every good and perfect gift, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning: and such as walk in the light, have fellowship with him; and his infinite perfections are employed to promote their welfare. He will supply all their need, according to his riches in glory; for the Lord God is a sun and a shield, he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Those who are favoured with his gracious presence will

say, Thy favour is life, and thy loving kindness is better than life. There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us, which puts gladness into the heart, more than men rejoice when corn and wine increase. Those who have union with God, have a peace which the world cannot give nor take away; they have a joy that no man taketh from them; a possession that will not fade away, for the everlasting God changeth not; his counsel shall stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations; and he has declared to his people, that he will never leave them nor forsake them. He will comfort them in all their tribulations. He is their defence in danger; they abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and their language is, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. He is a never-failing resource under every earthly privation. When riches make themselves wings and fly away, when friends go to their long home, when age and sickness have paralyzed the frame, then God will be found all-sufficient. Habakkuk says, Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The divine favour enables believers to triumph in death; David says, My strength and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Though I walk through the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee: thou art all my salvation and all my desire.—Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

This enjoyment of God, is what his people obtain in the present life; but there is a more abundant measure of it in the life to come. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has laid up for them that love him. This is what will not fade as a leaf, but be durable as eternity. It is called a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. When earthly possessions have perished, when the fashion of this world has passed away, when the luminaries in the firmament are extinguished, and the whole frame of nature dissolved, heaven will continue in all its splendour, for the glory of God and the Lamb are the light thereof. It will be a perpetual source of perfect felicity, for in God's presence is fulness of joys, and at his right hand are pleasures for ever more. It is therefore a prize worth contending for. It will do infinitely more than compensate for all previous labours and conflicts, for we reckon that the sufferings of this life, are not worthy to be compared with that glory that shall be revealed in us. It will wipe away all tears; it will satisfy every desire of the soul, for ever and ever. Therefore let heaven be the object of your pursuit; labour not for the meat that perishes, but for that which endures to eternal life. Set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Lay up your treasure in heaven, where moth doth not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal: that when you fail on earth, you may be received into everlasting mansions.

When it is allowed that the divine favour here, and heaven hereafter, are sufficient to make men happy and secure, it may be asked, How are these blessings to be obtained? the answer is, Through the merits of Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the

life; he gives access to God, and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He came into the world to save sinners; and to as many as receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God; and all his sons are heirs of heaven. The grace they receive, makes them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. This grace is freely granted by the new covenant of redemption; which is a covenant sealed with blood, well ordered in all things, and sure; established by great and precious promises. Moreover, the Almighty, to show to the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them. Here is ground for unshaken confidence; Christ the mediator of the new covenant, is the sure foundation which God has laid in Zion; the rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail: and as the Great High Priest of our profession, he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. So that the believer's hope of heaven, is as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. He is born again of incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever; and as he keeps himself in the love of God, the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, will bring him to eternal life. My sheep, says Christ, hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

It appears therefore, that man has a portion set before him that is suited to his immortal nature, that is high as heaven, and durable as eternity; and is favoured with every facility for the attainment of it. To attain this heavenly portion is the one thing needful, the better part that shall not be taken away. To the securing of this permanent felicity, we are

here urged by the consideration, that as to our earthly and sinful state, we all do fade as a leaf.

As you have here no continuing city, seek one to come, that is free from decay and vicissitude. Seek for that holiness without which no man can see the Lord; and for this holiness, seek by repentance towards God, and by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; who is able to save unto the uttermost. He once suffered for sin, and to them that look for him, he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. Therefore give diligence, that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

The brevity of human life is an inducement to the right use and improvement of time. With all who are now on the stage of life, time will soon be no more: when once it has passed away, it can never be recalled; and then those who have wasted it will have to exclaim, in anguish and despair, The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. Work while it is day; for the night cometh when no man can work. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

The shortness of human life is a motive to patience and resignation, as it shows that all trials and conflicts will be of short duration. Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning: this night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds; be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought unto you, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The ninetieth Psalm is called a prayer of Moses: and it is in some measure a paraphrase on the words under consideration; and eminently adapted

to edification. Of the Almighty it says, Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. Thus men are taught to know God as the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity; that they may sanctify the Lord of Hosts in their hearts, and reverence his holy name. The contrast is the perishing state of man, who is turned to destruction, carried away as with a flood, and spends his years as a tale that is told. The cause of this is transgression; hence the Psalmist says, Thou has set our iniquities before thee; our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. Then what is to balance these griefs, to remedy these evils, and open to men a source of joy and gladness? This is the favour and blessing of God, for which the Psalmist prays in the following words, Return, O Lord; and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Let thy work appear unto thy servants; and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

SERMON XVII.

“BLESSED are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life; and may enter in through the gates into the city.”—REV. xxii. 14.

WHAT must I do to be saved? is one of the most important questions contained in the scriptures; for mankind are involved in transgression, and it is written, The soul that sinneth it shall die: that is,

shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. Yet we are assured, that God is not willing that any of us should perish. He sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. But after all that Christ has done and suffered to save a lost world, many remain in the way of misery and destruction, and are in danger of everlasting perdition: hence the apostle says, How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? And it is certain, that men can no otherwise neglect their salvation, than by failing to fulfil the conditions on which it is granted. The question therefore is, What are the terms or conditions of a sinner's acceptance with God? Till this be known, men walk in darkness, and know not at what they stumble; the things which belong to their peace are hid from their eyes. What people are to do, in order that they may obtain eternal life, is fully and clearly set forth in the gospel of Christ. But this is not always stated in the same language: various words and phrases are employed, so as to require a comparison of different passages, to prevent any mistake. It is sometimes expressed by repentance; at other times by the fear and love of God; but more frequently it is expressed by faith or obedience; and when one of these only is mentioned, the other is always implied. If faith only is mentioned, it is to be understood of a faith that produces obedience; when obedience only is mentioned, it is to be understood of such obedience as springs from faith. In the words before us, obedience is stated to be the condition of eternal life; Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

The commandments of God, include all the indications of his will, whether given by his word, his

works, or the influence of his Spirit. He never left himself without witness in any nation; his wrath was revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men; so that those who had only the light of nature, were left without excuse for their iniquities. But the commands of God more especially denote the precepts of his word, which are given to be the rule and measure of all our words and actions, tempers and dispositions. In the sight of the Almighty, there can be no acceptable service, but the doing what he has commanded. Whatever is practised under the notion of piety and devotion, without a divine command, is no better than superstition and false worship. To such persons it may be said, Who hath required this at your hands? Do they suppose that the divine law is left imperfect, and that its deficiency is to be supplied by human devices? Or do they imagine that they know what will please God, better than he does himself? Our Saviour says, In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Nothing is to be added to what is written in the scriptures; on the other hand, nothing is to be taken away. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: if any man take away from the words of this book, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.

Whatsoever God has commanded to be done, or to be left undone, is a law of indispensable obligation to mankind; because he is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Judge of the world. The commands of God are reasonable, just, and good; but if they were not so, they would be equally binding on the children of men; for he is the supreme Governor of the Universe; he rules among the armies of heaven, and doeth what pleaseth him among the children of men. As his authority originates in the perfections of his own nature, it is absolute: Who art thou that

repliest against God? As the divine power is unlimited, it is irresistible: Can a worm of the earth contend with his Maker, so as either to succeed, or come off with impunity? Besides power and authority in the Divine Being, it is to be remembered, that to men he giveth life and breath and all things; and so bountifully, that the earth is full of his goodness: and under all circumstances he knows what is fittest and best for his creatures to do; it is therefore his province to command, and man's imperative duty to obey, whatever be the nature of the divine injunction.

The Almighty said to Adam, Of the tree in the midst of the garden thou shalt not eat, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. It is not known that there was any reason for this command, either in the nature of man, or in the quality of the fruit; for when the Almighty took a survey of what he had created and made, he saw that every thing was good: from this it appears to follow, that there was nothing in the forbidden fruit, that would have proved injurious to man, if it had not been prohibited. But the law was not less binding on that account; as the Almighty was pleased to make it the test of man's obedience. In the present day, man's obedience is not tried by such injunctions; all the precepts by which they are to be governed, are requisite to the well being of society. For instance, Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, are moral precepts, founded on reason and fitness, and productive of the greatest utility. If such laws had not been given, man could not have acted otherwise than these precepts require, without opening the flood-gates to misery and destruction. So that obedience to God is a reasonable service; but if in some cases, men cannot discover the reason of the injunction, that

does not diminish their obligation to obedience; and when they do see the reason of it, it is not on that account merely that they are to obey. When the Psalmist addresses the Almighty, with respect to his chastisements, he says, I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it: and the same consideration is the true principle of obedience, the duty is performed because God has commanded it.

Without obedience, no one can have the testimony that he pleaseth God; no one can escape condemnation, for every work will be brought into judgement, with every secret thing; and God will render to every man according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. After all Solomon's moral and philosophical disquisitions, he says, Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. Such obedience is equally required by the gospel: Christ did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to promote the fulfilling of them. The apostle says, Do we make void the law through faith? Nay we establish the law. The wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

When it is understood, that obedience to the gospel is indispensably required, the question is, in what manner obedience is to be performed, in order to acceptance? The answer is, that the heart must be engaged. The Almighty knows men's thoughts, and is acquainted with their motives, and cannot be pleased with outward service. By the mouth of the prophet he says, This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me: and on this account his judgements were inflicted on them. God looks at the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts. But by nature, the heart of man is prone to evil, and averse to that which is good; and a corrupt tree

cannot bring forth good fruit; as the apostle shows when he says, The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be: so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Hence appears the necessity of regeneration; a change from a carnal to a spiritual state. Therefore God commands all men, every where, to repent. Repentance includes a deep conviction of inward depravity, and of outward transgression; a godly sorrow for sin, a grief at heart, for having grieved God. This induces men to confess and forsake their iniquities, and to turn unto the Lord, with a broken spirit and a contrite heart; and with earnest supplications for mercy. Whilst in this state, they are directed to look to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so is the Son of Man lifted up; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life. When such believe with their hearts unto righteousness; when they believe that Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification, their iniquities are blotted out, and they have a peace with God that passeth understanding. Another happy result is a deliverance from the dominion of sin. The law of the spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, makes them free from the law of sin and death. They are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto them. And being thus made free from sin, they become the servants of God, having their fruit unto holiness, and their end eternal life. Being thus made spiritually minded, they can serve God in spirit and in truth. They delight to do his will. They obey from the heart the good commandment delivered unto them: And blessed are they that thus do his commandments.

Gospel obedience extends to every branch of mo-

ral duty. David says, then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments ; and the requirements of the gospel are equally extensive, for our Saviour says, Then are ye my disciples, if ye do whatever I have commanded. The apostle says, The grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. So that gospel obedience requires a proper government, and due restraint of a man's own passions and appetites. It requires justice, fidelity, and kindness, in his intercourse with mankind. It requires the fear, the love, and the worship of God. If any of these duties be neglected, the others will find no acceptance. Some are commendably temperate in all their personal enjoyments ; but if at the same time they are unjust, censorious, and unmerciful, they are to be ranked with the workers of iniquity. Some are honest and upright in all their worldly transactions ; and kind and tender-hearted towards the distressed ; but if their affections are not set on things above ; if they have no intercourse with heaven, if they neglect the worship of God, they cannot escape condemnation. Some are frequent and fervent in all devotional exercises, but if they defraud their neighbours, or give way to any unlawful indulgence, or are uncharitable, they cannot see the kingdom of God. The end to be kept in view is to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God : to be like Caleb and Joshua, who followed the Lord fully ; to imitate Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous before God, walking in all the commands and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Gospel obedience requires, constancy and perseverance. It is requisite for all times and seasons, for every day, and all day long, and under all the various circumstances of human life. As it is written, Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day ; for surely

there is an end, and thy expectation shall not be cut off. The apostle says, Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap if you faint not. For Christ says to all his followers, Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life : and the same, for substance, is affirmed in the words before us, Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.

That future felicity is intended, by the tree of life, and an entrance into the city, will most likely be admitted as indisputable; but how gospel obedience can give a right to it, may require some explanation. There are various ways in which a right to earthly possessions is acquired; some have a right by inheritance. But this does not depend on their own conduct, it descends to them before they have done either good or evil. In this way none can have a right to eternal life; for those who are now the people of God, were by nature children of wrath, even as others. A right may be acquired by purchase, by giving something of equal value for it; but in this way, gospel obedience cannot acquire a right to eternal life. Obedience is a duty which men owe to God, and the discharge of that duty, lays him under no obligation. Whatever men devote to his service, they only give him back his own; there is no merit in their best performances. When they have done the will of God they are to say, we are unprofitable servants. This was the view which Jacob took of his services, for he said, I am less than the least of all thy mercies; and not worthy the truth thou hast shown unto thy servant. This view all saints will have, when they appear before the throne above; for they will cast their crowns at the Redeemer's feet, and cry, Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be

all the glory.—A right may be obtained by gift or donation; what a person receives in this way, is as really his own, as if he had purchased it; and in this way only, can any mortal acquire a right to heaven. Eternal life is the gift of God. It is indeed a reward for the righteous, but the reward is of grace, not of debt; it comes from the pure kindness and free favour of God. But it should be distinctly understood and remembered, that a free gift may be conditional; a free pardon may be offered to rebels, on condition of laying down their arms. So eternal life is offered conditionally; for otherwise the wicked would have as good a title to it as the righteous, which they certainly have not. And as eternal life is offered conditionally, those who perform the condition, do thereby acquire a right to it, in virtue of the gracious stipulation made to them.

When all this is granted, it may still be disputed, whether gospel obedience is the condition, or one of the conditions of future happiness. Some contend that it is not the doctrine of St. Paul, for he says, By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.—When any are saved, it is by faith, that it might be by grace, not of works, lest any man should boast. From this it is concluded, that faith without obedience, is the sole condition of gospel salvation. This would appear to be correct, if nothing else was stated on this subject in other parts of scripture. The whole of the scriptures are given by inspiration of God, consequently one part is not to be so interpreted as to contradict, but so as to harmonize with all the other parts; and when this rule of interpretation is adopted, it will be understood, that when St. Paul speaks of men being saved without the works of the law, or without works, he alludes to Jewish rites and ceremonies; for these were called works in opposition to faith; and were at that time the only works in dispute: some were contend-

ing for their continuance under the gospel, and others were pleading for their total abolition. This was the side which the apostle took, and he proved that such works were inconsistent with the gospel of Christ. But the notion, that any person could be saved without the practice of moral duties, could never have entered into the mind of St. Paul, for he made it his business to affirm, wherever he went, that men were to repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance, or they could obtain no forgiveness. He exhorted all believers to be careful to maintain good works. He said let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity. Abstain from the appearance of evil. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; he that soweth to his flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Therefore nothing could be further from his mind, than to discard moral duties. — When he says men are saved by faith, he is to be understood of a faith, that produces obedience to the gospel; for, he says, Faith works by love, it purifies the heart, and overcometh the world: consequently it brings forth the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise and glory of God.

But even in the apostle's own time, there were some that mistook his meaning, and maintained that Christians were to be saved by faith without obedience. This was the error which St. James set himself to refute, and spake as follows, What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham justified by works, when he had offered Isaac upon the altar? Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith

without works is dead also. It is evident that James here gives the proper interpretation, to the words of Paul. He wrote a considerable time after it was admitted, that in Paul's writings there were some things hard to be understood, and which some perverted to the scandal of religion; and James' design, was to prevent such perversion in future. What he advances is free from absurdity, and contradiction; it is such a manifestation of the truth, as commends itself to every man's conscience, in the sight of God. It is creditable to religion, and profitable to men; it perfectly agrees with every other inspired writer, whether in the Old or the New Testament. It exactly corresponds with what Paul teaches in the other parts of his writings, for he most distinctly proves the necessity of obedience in order to salvation. He says, Christ became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him; and will take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but keeping the commandments of God. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. So we see how the two apostles agree together; and how they agree with our Saviour's statement, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven. The same is advanced in the words before us, Blessed are they that do his commandments; that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

What remains to be considered, is the happiness of the righteous in a future state, which is figuratively expressed by the tree of life. This agrees with what our Saviour promised to his people, when he said, To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

In these words there is an evident allusion, to that delightful abode, in which our first parents were placed by their bountiful Creator. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, and out of the ground he caused to grow, every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food: and the tree of life also in the midst of the garden. Of this tree we have no formal description, but it appears to have been a sacramental pledge of immortal life: so long as Adam and Eve had access to this tree, they were strangers to sickness and sorrow, pain and death. But by transgression, they forfeited their right to the tree of life; they were then driven out of paradise, and cherubim and a flaming sword were so placed, as to keep the way of the tree of life. So that man was excluded from all the benefits, which it either gave or represented. The flaming sword which guarded the tree of life, was an awful emblem of divine wrath; and it indicated the misery which sin had entailed on the human race. Man was then doomed to return to the dust from whence he had been taken, and his days were to be few and full of trouble. Thus sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and death passed upon all, for all have sinned. The death inflicted for sin, includes the second death, which is a death that never dies. But what was lost by the sin of Adam, is restored by the merits of Christ, who raises his people from the ruins of the fall, and reinstates them in all their forfeited possessions. He removes the flaming sword, and gives access to the tree of life. This tree bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. This may be regarded as an emblem of our Saviour, who abounds in all the fruits of redeeming grace; sufficient to supply all the wants of his people; for he came that they might have life; and that they might have it more abundantly. They receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace. He is their wisdom, righteous-

ness, sanctification, and redemption. He is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon him; they sit under his shadow with delight, and find his fruit sweet to their taste. And as Christ gives grace on earth, he will give glory in heaven. His people will be with him in paradise, and because he lives, they shall live also. They will behold his glory, and enter into his joy. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, for the gift of God is eternal life, and that life is in his Son. So that the followers of Christ have right to the tree of life. Upon them the second death has no power; they will be confirmed in immortal bliss; their inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away.

It is further stated, respecting those who do his commandments, that they enter through the gates into the city. The future abode of the righteous is called a paradise, as it is a place of delight; and it is called a city, as it is a place of strength and security, of grandeur and magnificence. St. Paul says, the patriarchs desired a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city. This, he says, Is a city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. John had a vision of this holy city, and says, I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. The city was of pure gold, like unto clear glass; the wall of it was of jasper; and the foundations of the city, were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon; to shine in it; for the

glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

To this holy city, the righteous enter through the gates. The Lord of glory opens the gates of heaven, and no man can shut them; he shutteth and no man can open them. The gates of heaven are so shut against the workers of iniquity. There shall in no case enter into it, any thing that defileth; neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; neither thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. The gates of heaven are shut against all who have merely the form of religion, for except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye can in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. In the parable of the ten virgins, those who had only a lamp of profession, came saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I know you not. Such will for ever be excluded, from the mansions of the blessed.

But the gates of heaven will be opened to all who fear God and work righteousness. David says, Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in the holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. This is the gate of the Lord which the righteous shall enter. Holiness of heart and life, form a safe passport to heaven. Those who are made the sons of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, are heirs of glory. Those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, are made meet, to be partakers of the inheritance with all the saints in light: and they are free citizens of the New Jerusalem. So that they will undoubtedly enter through the gates into the city.

The manner in which they will enter through the gates, remains to be considered. St. Peter describes the entrance as abundant. If ye do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be minis-

tered to you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It will be through the abundant mercy and goodness of God ; it will abundantly confirm the great and precious promises of the gospel ; it will be an abundant blessing to the people of God, with which they will be richly satisfied. It will be so broad and spacious as to be easy and convenient. In the present world, strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life : it is incommoded with many difficulties and hinderances ; but the entrance into glory will be the reverse ; every obstruction will be removed ; there will be no hinderance nor discouragement. Such an entrance into heaven will be opened to the righteous, as will admit of whatever can be of service to them, when they stand before their judge. It is written, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord ; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. The original is, that their works go with them : they are accompanied by their work of faith, their labour of love, and patience of hope. All that they have done and suffered in the cause of God, will go with them to enhance their future reward : so that a happy and an abundant entrance will be given them.

The entrance through the gates will be immediate ; when the people of God have finished the work that is given them to do, they will not be detained from their reward. Purgatory is a mere figment of the human mind ; and is so opposite to the gospel, that it needs no refutation. But some who do not imbibe that absurdity, maintain that the soul will sleep with the body till the morning of the resurrection : but this notion does not agree with the oracles of God. For the scriptures teach, that when the dust shall return to the dust, the spirit shall go to God who gave it. Our Saviour said to the penitent on the cross, To-day, thou shalt be with me in paradise. And when Lazarus died, he was carried by angels

into Abraham's bosom. St. Paul says, To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord ; and on this account he had a desire to depart, that he might be with Christ. There is therefore no intermediate state between death and glory. The passage of the soul from earth to heaven, will be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

The entrance through the gates of heaven, will be with joy and gladness. The prophet says, the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. If this was true of the Jews, when they returned from captivity to their own land, and to the place of their religious solemnities, it will be more fully verified in those who ascend to the realms of bliss. When the Jews returned to Zion, they found their city and temple in ruins ; they were surrounded with enemies, and had to sustain many severe and doubtful conflicts. But those who enter the heavenly Jerusalem, will find every thing in the perfection of beauty ; they will have escaped from all their toils and troubles, and thenceforth they will stand before the throne, and serve God, day and night in his temple. Such a happy consummation will inspire, in the highest degree, a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. When the gates of heaven will be opened to the people of God, with what extacy will their souls magnify the Lord, and their spirits rejoice in God their Saviour !

‘ They will view the sweet plains on the banks of the river.

‘ And sing of salvation, for ever and ever.’

The entrance through the gates into the city, will be triumphant. Those who enter will have abundant reason to triumph, because all their foes are

vanquished, and their own mighty enterprises are achieved. In their way to the kingdom they had to encounter the most formidable opposition. They had to wrestle not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. But by taking the whole armour of God, they were able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. To stand approved in the sight of their Creator and Redeemer; to stand after their enemies have been bruised under their feet; and so to stand as to receive the fruits of their victories and conquests. And this infinitely excels all earthly triumphs. St. Paul says, The time of my departure is at hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. This was triumphant language, worthy the great apostle. But he had to walk by faith and not by sight; he was still burdened with his earthly tabernacle; he had not passed the floods of Jordan; he was within reach of the arrows of death. So that even his triumph will be far exceeded in the realms of bliss; for those who enter in through the gates into the city, will have their faith turned into sight, and their hope into enjoyment; they will see more clearly that their warfare is accomplished, and what will be the glorious result; and whilst surrounded with celestial trophies of victory, they will exclaim, Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

The entrance through the gates into the city will be final; for those who enter abide there for ever. Our Saviour says, Him that overcometh, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. Such will have done with those things that perish with the using; and will have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: they

will be placed beyond the regions of hazard and vicissitude ; where all their possessions are secure and permanent. After our first parents had been placed in paradise, they were driven out of it on account of their disobedience ; but in the realms above, there will be no serpent to beguile by his subtlety ; there will be no forbidden fruit as a test of obedience ; the state of probation will be terminated ; the hearts of God's people will be established in holiness. So that he who is holy will be holy still ; and as their holiness is certain to continue, so is their glory and felicity. As soon as they have entered through the gates into the city,

“ They are far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in.”

For in God's presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Such are the glorious prospects which our Saviour sets before those who hear his voice and follow him. He gives them eternal life, and they shall never perish ; nor shall any man pluck them out of his hand.—What think you of Christ ? Will ye be his disciples ? But you cannot serve him with any acceptance, unless you remember his commandments to do them. Yet there is this encouragement, his commands are not grievous but joyous, and in keeping of them there is great reward. Moreover, you are not required to do this in your own strength ; you will be endowed with power from on high ; so that when you can do nothing of yourselves, you can do all things through Christ strengthening you : and then you will prove by happy experience, that blessed are they that do his commandments.

It is needful to remember that the blessing announced on the obedient, implies a curse on the disobedient. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked ; his wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men. He says, Be-

hold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: a blessing, if ye will obey the commandments of the Lord your God; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord. And the gospel informs us that those who have done good, will be raised to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. That the Judge will say to the former, Come, ye blessed; and to the latter, Go, ye cursed. These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. Such is the awful difference that will be made between the righteous and the wicked, between them that serve God, and them that serve him not.

In order to serve God with acceptance, be careful not to separate faith and obedience. In a separate state, neither of them can promote your salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please God, whatever service you might perform. On the other hand, faith without works is unprofitable and vain. Therefore seek to have a living faith, and show your faith by your works: then you will adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour; you will shine as lights in the world; you will hold on your way, and in the Lord grow stronger and stronger, till you attain the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

SERMON XVIII.

“FOR I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.”—JOB xix. 25—27.

WHEN Job spake these words, he was involved in great and complicated afflictions; and his reputed friends increased his distress, by the judgement they passed upon him. They strongly maintained, that his afflictions were the result, and the proof of his iniquity. In confirmation of this they said, Those that sow wickedness reap the same; but who ever perished being innocent? In reference to a vile man they said, His root shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branches be cut off. This was intended as a description of Job's condition, when his body was brought to the brink of the grave, and all his children had been slain: then they added, Surely this is the house of the wicked, and the habitation of him that knoweth not God. In reply to these accusations, Job says, How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? Why do you persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? But though Job was persecuted, he was not forsaken; though he was perplexed, he was not in despair. He was confident there would be a future day of retribution; when his character would be vindicated, and all his troubles would meet with a recompense. As what he had to advance on this subject was of infinite importance, he wished it was

published to the world, and recorded throughout all generations. Hence he says, O that my words were now written ! that they were printed in a book ! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever ! His earnest desire was, that the record should be both legible and durable, that it might be known and read of all men. What he was so anxious to spread abroad, and preserve to the end of time, was this confession of faith, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

A redeemer, in ancient times, was a man who effected an important deliverance, for some person or persons in distress. But Job could not expect any human redeemer to deliver him out of his afflictions ; for he declares he was abandoned by his former acquaintances, and was become a byword among the people. If there had been any disposed to assist him, it was utterly out of their power to accomplish his deliverance. If he had been speaking only of a restoration to health, and the comforts of life, it would not have been so interesting to the human race, as to deserve to be engraven on a rock for ever. Besides it is evident he had no hope of a temporal deliverance ; for he had said a little before, My days are past, my purposes are broken off ; the graves are ready for me. Moreover, Job's redeemer was to stand at the latter day upon the earth. For these reasons, it appears he did not speak of any human redeemer ; he is to be understood of a divine redeemer, who could accomplish spiritual and eternal redemption. Such a redeemer is Christ ; and he was promised to the patriarchs ; and the promise of him they embraced by a living faith ; in virtue of which, Abraham desired to see the day of Christ : he saw it and was glad. Jacob spake of the angel that redeemed him from all evil, to whom he prayed for a blessing upon his children : and Job here declares his confidence in a living redeemer.

The term **לֹאָה**, rendered redeemer, sometimes denotes a near kinsman; for to such, in ancient times, the right of redemption belonged. In this sense Christ is our redeemer; he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. He was made like unto his brethren, by the assumption of human nature. God sent forth his Son, made of a woman; born under the law; to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. The word that was in the beginning with God, and the word that was God, was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. His incarnation shows his wonderful kindness and condescension. Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. His incarnation lays a foundation for our confidence in his merits and grace, for by this means he was able to give his life for the world. He did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

It was the office of a redeemer, in ancient times, to deliver from slavery or any other distress, including both present and impending evils: and mankind have need of such redemption, with respect to their spiritual and eternal state. They have been brought into bondage, and detained in captivity. They are by nature carnal, sold under sin; they are slaves to corruption: for of whatsoever a man is overcome, of that he is brought into bondage. They have fallen into the snare of the devil, and are led captive by him at his will. He is the spirit that works in the children of disobedience: he works in them, that he may keep them in a state of rebellion against God, and by that means accomplish their eternal destruction. But it is the office of Christ, to procure the release of those who are in Satan's bondage. His word proclaims liberty to the captive, and the open-

ing of the prison to them that are bound ; and all who receive him, are made free from the law of sin and death ; they are brought out of the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. They are liberated from the service of the wicked one ; they are freed from all guilt and condemnation ; they are delivered from going down to the pit, for there is found out a ransom.

In ancient times, it was likewise the office of a redeemer, to restore such possessions as had been alienated ; and in this respect mankind are in great need of a redeemer, as far as their immortal souls are concerned. When man fell into transgression, he lost his most valuable immunities and endowments ; he lost the divine favour which is better than life ; he lost a good conscience, and by that means, all peace and tranquillity of mind ; he lost the divine image in which he was formed, and which constituted his greatest dignity and glory ; he lost his title to heaven, which was prepared for his everlasting habitation. So that fallen man, as to his spiritual state, was wretched and miserable, poor, and blind, and naked. But in this respect Christ is our Redeemer. He came into the world to raise up man from the ruins of the fall, and reinstate him in all those possessions he had forfeited and lost. And to as many as receive him, he gives the power to become the sons of God. And those who receive this adoption, are restored to God's favour, and walk in the light of his countenance ; they have the witness of the Spirit, which restores the approbation of their conscience, and gives them peace ; they are made partakers of the divine nature, created anew in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of Him who created them. And such are heirs of glory, and are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Such are the inestimable benefits of gospel redemption.

Redemption among the Jews, was sometimes accomplished by price ; a stipulated sum was paid for the release of slaves, and likewise for the restoration of property. In this manner Christ has procured the redemption of mankind ; he has paid down what was demanded for their ransom ; he endured the penalty of the law they had broken ; that he might redeem them from the curse of the law, and thus deliver them from the awful consequences of their transgressions. When he laid down his life, he gave himself a ransom for all. Hence those who reject him, are said to deny the Lord that bought them. St. Paul speaks of the Church of God, which Christ purchased with his own blood. And he says to believers, ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price. St. Peter says, Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot. And all the saints in glory sing, Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy own blood.

Redemption was sometimes effected by power. And among the Hebrews, the person whose office it was to avenge the murder of his relative, had the name of redeemer ; and even in this sense Christ redeems his people ; as he takes vengeance on their adversaries. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, as well as to bruise his head. In reference to which he says, O death, I will be thy plagues : O grave, I will be thy destruction. The day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. Israel was said to be redeemed out of Egypt, and that was by the exercise of divine power ; and it is by such a power that man's redemption is accomplished. For this purpose Christ had all power in heaven and on earth ; and by this power he maintains dominion over the rulers of the darkness of this world ; he subdues the evil propensities of the

human heart, and gives his people strength according to their day : which they find so efficacious and beneficial, that they can glory in their infirmities, in order that the power of Christ may rest upon them. When they can do nothing of themselves, they can do all things through Christ strengthening them. So that they can hold on their way, and in the Lord grow stronger and stronger. Therefore, notwithstanding all the opposition of earth and hell, the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with songs ; they shall obtain joy and gladness ; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. In this manner we have redemption through Christ, according to the riches of his grace.

Job says, I know that my Redeemer liveth, or is the living one : by which we learn that Christ is a living redeemer : so indeed were all others, when they accomplished any redemption. But they were mortal, so that any aid expected from them was very precarious, however much it might be wanted. But Christ is a living redeemer, in the fullest sense of the word ; for as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given the Son to have life in himself : a life which had neither beginning of days, nor end of time ; and which is constantly devoted to the welfare of his people. Hence he says, Fear not ; I am the first and the last ; I am he that liveth and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.

The term, living, was, at that period, properly applied to Christ, even in reference to his mediatorial office. It is true, that in Job's time, he had not assumed human nature ; yet as Mediator between God and man he was living in the council of the Almighty, who purposed man's salvation in Christ, before the world began. He was living in the promises and predictions of a Saviour, for the Almighty had declared that the seed of the woman should

bruise the serpent's head ; that in the seed of Abraham, all the families of the earth should be blessed.

He was then living in the hopes and expectations of his people, for they saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them ; hence the apostle says, These all died in faith. Christ was then living by the communication of his grace and spirit. The Old Testament saints, as well as those of the New, received out of his fulness, and grace for grace.

The term, living, applies to Christ, on account of the perpetual efficacy of his sacrifice, and his continued intercession. By one sacrifice he has for ever perfected them who are sanctified. His sacrifice retains its saving efficacy throughout all ages. The Jewish priests could not continue in office by reason of death ; but Christ has an unchangeable priesthood ; he is a Priest for ever ; and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The term, living, applies to Christ, as he is the source of life to his people. He quickens those who were dead in trespasses and sins ; he both gives and preserves this spiritual life. He is the living bread that cometh down from heaven, and if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever. His grace is a well of living water springing up to eternal life. St. Paul says, I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Therefore, with the greatest propriety, Christ is called a living redeemer : and it was Job's consolation to know this. It comforted him in all his tribulations. He was visited with many heavy calamities ; he was deprived of his numerous flocks and herds, all his children had gone down to an untimely grave, bodily affliction had brought him into the valley and shadow of death,

and all who were about him treated him with cruelty. But when all his earthly comforts were fled, it was his support and consolation to know, that he had a living redeemer, who would never leave him nor forsake him ; who would deliver him out of all his troubles, and be the strength of his heart and his portion for-ever. The same source of consolation is open to believers in all ages ; hence they can say, Thanks be to God, who causeth us always to triumph in Christ.

Job further states, that his redeemer shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. By the latter day, might be understood the times of the gospel, which is the last dispensation of grace. St. Paul says, God who spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son. At this period Christ stood upon the earth by his appearance in the flesh. But Job is rather to be understood of Christ's second coming, when he will judge the quick and the dead : for what Job says is connected with the resurrection of the body. What is rendered, upon the earth, equally denotes above it, as in the atmosphere or the clouds. The term אחרון, rendered the latter day, denotes the last ; and this applies more accurately to the final judgement. This awful period may be called the last, emphatically, as it will be the end of every thing pertaining to the present world. When Christ will come in the clouds of heaven, the day of gospel grace will be terminated ; the Spirit of God will no more strive with men ; the mediatorial office of Christ will be vacated : then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.

When Christ will come to judgement, it will be at the last, because man's probationary state will have come to a conclusion. He that is holy will be holy still, and he that is unholy will be unholy still. Then

every gracious season and opportunity afforded to men below, will be passed away. An angel will lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that there shall be time no longer. The final judgement may be called the last, because all the works of the inanimate creation will perish. The visible heavens will pass away with a great noise; the elements will melt with fervent heat; and the earth and all things therein will be burned up. The whole frame of nature will dissolve, and all that constitutes the present universe will vanish away.

The great day of accounts may be called the last, because God's moral government in the world will be terminated; and all the designs of his providence will be accomplished. The part which every man has acted on the stage of life will be completed; and then the judgement will sit, and the books will be opened. Then shall ye discern between the righteous and the wicked; between them that serve God, and them that serve him not: for the Judge of all will render to every man according to the deeds done in the body; whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. This awful scene we presume Job was contemplating, when he declared that his redeemer would stand at the last upon, or over, the earth.

That Job should look forward to the great day of accounts, is in nowise improbable; for the patriarchs knew there would be a future judgement, when the Judge of the whole earth would do right. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to convict the ungodly of their evil deeds, and impious speeches; and to execute judgement upon all. Job might be acquainted with this prophecy, or if not, the inspiration of the Almighty might give him this understanding.—The consideration of a future judgement, was appropriate to the circumstances in which

Job was then placed. His character had been vilely aspersed at the bar of his mistaken friends ; they had charged him with committing wicked actions, under a veil of hypocrisy ; and discarded all he advanced in his own vindication. It was therefore natural and reasonable for him to appeal to a higher tribunal, to him who searches the heart, and who judges righteously. So that when he spake of his redeemer coming at the last, it was as much as to say, Judge nothing before the time ; for the Lord cometh, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make known the counsels of the heart ; and then shall every man, who is praiseworthy, have praise of God.

Job might likewise refer to the final judgement, in expectation that light would then be thrown on his present dark dispensation. He was brought into darkness, as he could not discover the reason of his afflictions, nor reconcile them with the justice of the divine government. So that he might have said, respecting the Almighty, Darkness and clouds are round about him : how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out ! To those who thus speak, the reply of the Divine Being is, What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter. For light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The transactions at the last day, will be a manifestation of God's righteous judgements ; the wisdom and gracious designs of his providence will appear, to the full satisfaction of those who have been most severely tried in the present world. And this we may presume Job was anticipating, when he said, I know that my redeemer liveth ; and that he will stand at last upon the earth.

Job likewise contemplated a resurrection from the dead ; for he says, In my flesh shall I see God, though my reins be consumed within me. The living know

that they shall die; that they will be brought down to the grave, and the house appointed for all living. It is therefore of importance to know, that the grave must one day give up its prey: and we are fully assured, that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. This doctrine is highly interesting to all mortals here below; and more especially so, to one in Job's situation; for he was so wasted away, that he had begun to number himself with the dead. He said, The grave is my house; I have made my bed in darkness; I have said to corruption, thou art my father; and to the worm, thou art my mother and sister. But in this doleful state, he was cheered with the prospect of being raised up at the last day, so that in his flesh he would see God, and his entire person would inhabit the realms of bliss, and be no more subject to dissolution.

Job was confident, that though his earthly tabernacle was entirely dissolved, yet it would be raised to life again: for he says, If after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. His skin was so rent and decayed by sores, that he considered it to be destroyed; and if the whole of his earthly frame should in like manner perish, it would not prevent its resurrection. The word worms, is not in the original; Job says, If this body be destroyed, or destroy this body; that is in any manner, or by any means. Let it waste away, as the skin has done before it; let it be eaten by worms, or consumed by fire; let it be reduced to dust, and mingled with its kindred ashes; yet it will be raised up at the last day. It is not incredible that God should raise the dead. He that made man out of the dust, can call him forth out of the grave. Such is the greatness of his power and wisdom, that whatever the work be, when he speaks it is done; when he commands, it stands fast.

Job expected the same body to rise again, which he possessed in the present life. When he says,

Though my reins be consumed within me, it intimates that the entire dissolution of the earthly frame, might appear as an objection to its rising again; and so it has appeared to many; but the destruction of the body could not appear as any objection to the resurrection, unless it was understood of the same body. And this is what the scriptures teach; namely that the body which sleeps in the dust, is to awake; the body which is in the grave will come forth; this mortal body is to put on immortality. Unless the same body rose again, there could be no resurrection. But though it is the same body with regard to its essence, it will be very different with regard to its modification. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. In that state it will never be subject to pain, weakness, or langour; it will never be any burden to the soul; it will need no aliment for its support; it will have no tendency to dissolution. And it will be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body; for as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. This will be the redemption of the body, which St. Paul declared to be the object of his hope and earnest expectation.

Job further declares, that hereafter he will be favoured with a sight of the Almighty; In my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold. This corresponds with the New Testament, which shows that the happiness of heaven, consists in the vision of God. It is the felicity of angels, that they always behold the face of their Father, in heaven. Our Saviour says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. When John describes the heavenly Jerusalem, he says, The throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face.

In some measure, God is seen in the present world; for the heavens declare his glory; and the firmament showeth his handywork. So that the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.—He is seen by the eye of faith, for faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. By faith Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible.—God is seen by the dispensations of his providence; he is known by the judgements which he executeth in his moral government. Such deliverances have been wrought out for his people, as have led them to exclaim, This is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes.—God is seen in the ordinances of his house. He that dwelleth between the cherubim, shines forth; and the devout worshipper will say, Surely God is in this place; it is none other than the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven. One thing, says David, have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.—God is seen by peculiar manifestations, for he manifests himself to his people, as he does not to the world; and this he does more clearly on special occasions, as Job found by experience, when he said, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. But all these methods of seeing God will be far exceeded in a future state; for now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now we know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away, and we shall know as we are known.

Hereafter God will be seen more perfectly than he is in the present world, by the eye of the mind; because the mind will be greatly improved: we may

reasonably expect, that the understanding will be more comprehensive, the perception more vivid and accurate, and the memory more retentive: and there will be superior sources of information. So that more will be known of the works of creation, providence, and redemption; by which the divine perfections are made manifest: and those who know more of these things, will know more of God himself: and so far as he is known, he may be said to be seen.

The righteous, after the resurrection, may be said to see God with their bodily eyes; for the heavens have received Christ in his glorified humanity, and where he is, there shall his servants be also, that they may behold his glory: and those who see him, do in effect see the Father; because the glory of God is seen in the face of Christ.

Such a sight of God, cannot fail to be a source of consummate felicity. Solomon says, It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun; yet it will be more pleasant to behold the Creator of that luminary, who shines with infinitely more splendour.—It is said, The eye is never satisfied with seeing; which is true of all things here below: but the Psalmist says, As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; then shall I be satisfied, when I wake up after thy likeness. A sight of the Divine Being, will satisfy the most intense desire of the human heart, and will give a fulness of joy, above all we can ask or think.—In the present world, men may see many fine things, to which they have no claim; they are exclusively the property of others. But those who will see the King in his beauty, and the land that is very far off, will be interested in all his perfections, riches, and grandeur; and while his glories are displayed, they will be led to exclaim, Lo, this is our God, for ever and ever.—In the present life there are some things splendid and beautiful, which quickly pass away: they can only be seen by a mere glance,

or a very transient view. But the perfection of beauty in heaven, is durable and lasting; it will never disappear, nor fade away. Those who see it, will

“Gaze, transported at the sight,
To all eternity.”

It is not only an exceeding, but an eternal weight of glory. It will therefore be the highest felicity for the righteous to see God, whom they shall see for themselves, and their eyes shall behold.

Job says, I *know* that my redeemer liveth, and that in my flesh shall I see God; he did not hope, desire, or expect it merely: he expresses his full assurance thereof. Such assurance was the privilege of the Old Testament saints. Abel obtained the witness that he was righteous: Enoch had the testimony that he pleased God: and all who knew their present acceptance, would know that God would be their shield, and their exceeding great reward: that he would guide them by his counsel, and afterwards bring them to glory. It is still more likely that New Testament saints, should have this assurance, because life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. Accordingly, St. Paul says, I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded he is able to keep what I have committed unto him, against that day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. And he speaks of this as the common privilege of believers; for he says, We desire that you every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end: forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. So then, every Christian should be able to adopt these words of Job, I know that my redeemer liveth, and that in my flesh shall I see God.

But certain qualifications are requisite to enable people to use this language; men may have a form

of religion, and be moral in their conduct, and not be in a state of salvation. Before any can properly use the words before us, they have been brought to feel their need of a redeemer; they have been convinced of their guilty state before God; they have seen themselves in danger of eternal destruction; and they have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them: the hope set before them in the gospel, which points perishing sinners to Christ: and in him they have believed with their hearts unto righteousness; for it is he that believeth that hath the witness in himself, and is prepared to say, I know that my redeemer liveth.—Those who have the assurance expressed in the words before us, were dead and are alive again; they were lost and are found: the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto them: that mind is in them that was in Christ, and they walk as he also walked; for to such only do the promises of eternal life belong. Christ says, My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, nor shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Those who have the assurance of the divine favour here, and of heaven hereafter, have a privilege inexpressibly great and glorious. It is a perpetual spring of Christian consolation: it gives a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; it gives a joy that a stranger intermeddleth not with. This assurance inspires a hope, in all the storms of life, which is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither Christ the forerunner for us is entered. Those who have this assurance, are strengthened with all might, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness. The bright prospect at the end of their journey, makes them forget 'the troubles of the way:' hence the apostle says, For this cause we

faint not; for though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day: for we reckon that the sufferings of this life, are not worthy to be compared with that glory that shall be revealed in us.—This assurance is a shield of faith that turns aside the fiery darts of the wicked one: it makes the righteous as bold as a lion; it enables them, in the face of all opposition, to say, Let us go up and possess the land, for we are well able. Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that has loved us.—Those who have this assurance, are preserved from all undue attachment to the world; for their affections are set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Their treasure is laid up in heaven; and where their treasure is, there will their hearts be also.—This assurance is the best preparation for a sick-bed, and a dying hour; for to those who possess it, death has lost its sting, and the grave its victory: so that in the presence of the last enemy their language is, For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

Do not live without this privilege. If professors of religion have no assurance of their interest in Christ, they will be subject to doubts and fears; they will have no well-grounded hope of heaven; they can have no abiding consolation; they will not be prepared for the calamities and conflicts of life. They will not be able to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; they cannot live a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved them, and gave himself for them; they cannot be always ready to give, with meekness and reverence, an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them: they cannot rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks, which is the will of God concerning them. Therefore, let this blessing be sought by

faith and prayer. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, which God has promised to them that ask him : and faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it. And when you have the witness of the Spirit, you will be able to say, I know that my redeemer liveth, and that in my flesh shall I see God.

The doctrine of redemption through Christ, is mercifully adapted to the state of guilty man ; it opens a way by which the greatest sinners may flee from the wrath to come. As Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, all their iniquities may be forgiven. Though they are tied and bound with the chain of their iniquities, the pitifulness of God's tender mercy can loose them ; for with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption. God is not willing that any of us should perish. In order to save immortal souls, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all : and will he not with him freely give us all things ? all things which will verify his great and precious promises ? See then that you receive not the grace of God in vain. Repent, and be converted, that your iniquities may be blotted out. The Saviour says, Come, for all things are now ready. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?

The doctrine of redemption applies to the righteous : it shows what great things have been done for them. Christ has suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God. He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. By this means believers are made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ : they have the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come ; which includes the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. While they contemplate this great mystery of godliness, they are led to exclaim, Thanks be to God for his

unspeakable gift. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.

The doctrine of redemption teaches purity of heart and life; for Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. If he wash us not, we have no part in him. Therefore seek to be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that you may perfect holiness in the fear of God. Let your life and conversation evince, that though ye were the servants of sin, yet being made free from sin ye became the servants of God, having your fruit unto holiness, and your end eternal life.

The doctrine of redemption, teaches the people of God to be humble, for they are not saved by any merit in themselves; but through the infinite goodness and mercy of God. When we were without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, that he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Therefore, not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name be all the glory.

As redemption humbles the sinner, it exalts the Saviour. It gives him a name, above every name, that in the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. To you that believe, Christ is precious, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Such is the privilege and practice of all, who on sure ground can say, I know that my redeemer liveth.

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